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THE
SOVEREIGNS OF JUDAH.

A SERIES OF SERMONS

BY

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SOVEREIGNS OF JUDAH.

I.

ANTECEDENTS.

Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.—DEUT. XVII: 15.

TO HIM who declares the end from the beginning nothing is contingent or unforeseen. He can never find cause to devise an expedient for an occasion after it has arisen, because the occasion and the expedient were always known, and the treatment of them planned in the recesses of His infinite mind. His acts and procedures in the affairs of men have their roots far back in that wisdom which was “set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ere the earth was.” “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” The verbal outcoming of his eternal purposes by the ministry of men is prophecy, which is naught else but the inspired declaration of such of God’s eternal purposes as he chooses to disclose to mortals by the agency of one of their number, selected and quali-

fied for that office. Moses was eminently a prophet of God ; and in the passage which contains our text he prophesies a momentous change in the civil polity of his people, by which their government should be transformed from a simple theocracy into a monarchy ; theocratic still in its inner spirit and meaning, but in its outward form a monarchy, like that of other nations. They were, in time, to have a king, and to be reckoned a kingdom among the kingdoms of the earth. They would, sooner or later, have a craving for a monarchial establishment, and their craving would be gratified ; and yet, as the craving was sinful, and arose out of worldliness and unbelief and the decay of religious principle, the gratification of their wish should be its punishment, while yet it should be, on the whole, salutary for them, being such as they were. Moses *might* have seen this change by his natural sagacity, for it was the proper result of causes, which, even in his day, were visibly at work. But he was commissioned to proclaim it as the messenger of God also, who foresaw their weakness and prescribed for it in anger indeed ; and yet, in his displeasure, he remembered mercy, and would bring out of evil a specific and important good. Thus it appears that the germs of the monarchy that sprang up in the days of Samuel, the prophet, went back to the time of Moses ; and that they were hidden in the theocracy that went before it, as the wings of the moth are folded up for future use within the worm that produces it, or as the plant is invisibly shut up in the seed from which it is to

issue. From time to time this monarchical tendency in the Israelitish constitution came out in the days of the Judges, under whom the nation, or some part of the nation, were temporarily governed by the leadership of a single man. So that when at last, in answer to their wish, God "gave them a king in his anger," it was the development of a principle known before, and already partially acted upon; but the substitution, for an unconnected and irregular series of individuals called forth by a special exigency, of a continuous and hereditary line of sovereigns charged with the customary functions of government in ordinary as well as in extraordinary times.

I intend to bring the kings of this line before you in a series of lectures, in order to extract from them the instruction which the word of God intends to convey to us in the record of their respective lives. This royal line is prefaced by the exceptional reign of Saul, a man after their own human heart, given to Israel to teach them the folly of their choice; but it has its permanent establishment in David, the man after God's heart. In his descendants it continues till it vanishes in the Babylonish Captivity, not again to reappear till it should revive in the person of that Son of David, whose "kingdom is not of this world," when the dishonored sceptre of civil rule, in the hand of the Idumean Herod, was about to depart from Judah and a lawgiver from between his feet, because that Shiloh had come to whom the gathering of the people was to be. Herein God had fulfilled his threat to the last of the line, the

miserable Zedekiah. "And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end. Thus saith the Lord God: Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same; exalt him that is low and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." As preliminary to this series of discoveries, it has seemed to me that it might be useful to go back and show how the germs of the kingdom were to be found in the civil polity of the Israelites from the beginning; how it was foretold and provisions were made for it by their great lawgiver himself; how it came at last, not as a fortuitous and unpremeditated measure, but as the fulfillment of a purpose all along cherished in the mind of God; and how the course of preceding events had led on to it as a natural, if not necessary, consequence.

The civil polity given to the children of Israel at their first establishment in the land of Canaan was a pure theocracy. What then is a theocracy? The word signifies the rule of God. In a sense this word is applicable to every form of human government, for by him "kings rule and princes decree justice." "There is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God; whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God." Whoever is the ruler, however he obtained his rule, and by whatsoever tenure he holds it, he is but a subordinate and a deputy, and holds his authority in sub-

jection to the dominion of Him whose "kingdom ruleth over all." But God was pleased to establish over his chosen people a closer and more immediate authority of his own, one that ordinarily dispensed with the interventions of a human head, and that was designed to stand to them in the direct relations of their civil chief magistrate. They were to have no human king or chieftain, elective or hereditary, no visible throne or sceptre, no man whose word should be law to them, or whose guidance they were to trust in peace and in war. Their Sovereign was invisible; his palace was in the skies, far above, out of their sight; his behests were made known to them supernaturally by direct communication from Heaven. This was a great honor and a great privilege, for it ensured to them a control absolutely perfect and infallible, a direction in which there could never be the slightest defect, error, or fickleness. And if the spirit of a perfect faith and obedience had been in them, it must have brought to them perfect bliss and perfect prosperity. But these qualities were indispensable to its well-working. They must *see* Him that is invisible. He must be real to them, habitually recognized, his presence felt, and his agency remembered. He would "guide them with his eye," and they must be always looking to his eye to discover the import of its glances, to heed the direction of its outlook. If they did not, he would be to them but a dumb ruler, whose mind they could not learn and interpret. And when they learned his will they must be ready to obey it im-

plicitly. There must be no hesitation, no reluctance, no criticism, no bringing into comparison or competition with it some judgment of their own, or of some other human creature, no paring it down, no adding to it. In this sense Israel might say, so as no other nation ever could say, "The Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King." The law of Moses provided no human head for them. There were local and tribal magistrates for inferior needs; but to Jehovah they were to look as to them all and more than all that the kings of the earth were to the nations under them. This is a pure theocracy.

But the history of the nation soon proved it a failure, not on account of any fault in it or in its All-wise Author, but in them. This result their great lawgiver foresaw, their God foresaw, and therefore provided for them in due time the abandonment of this system and the substitution of another, not so good intrinsically as the first—not so good practically if they had used that well; but better for them, yes, necessary for them, being such as they were, if they were not to be left a prey to anarchy, and given up to "confusion and every evil work." Look at the history of Israel during the period of the Judges. For, remember, the Judges were not stated rulers, but exceptional chiefs, raised up for emergencies, when ruin seemed to be impending under the theocratic rule against which they had grown rebellious. They forgot God,—that is the descriptive and pregnant phrase under which their defection is described. They *ceased* to recognize

Him; they did not look after His will; they did not resort to Him for guidance and protection. They were not subject to His will when they knew it. God ceased to be to them a present God, a God active in their concerns, the God whose love encompassed their nation, and kept it as the apple of His eye. He grew to be to them a God afar off. The nations about them had visible gods and visible kings. They tired of the theocracy, and would be as the nations, and have a court and worship, palpable, ornamental, dazzling. God left them to themselves, and they were soon plunged in disaster and distress. There was anarchy at home, abroad defeat and captivity. In their distress they remembered God, and he sent deliverers to them. But their repentances were shallow and brief. Another and another human savior came, but there was no permanent recovery of the lost principle of faith and obedience. These Judges were proleptic outcomings of that monarchical principle which was finally to be established in a continuous line of kings that was to be at once the punishment and the remedy of their apostasy from the true principles of that glorious theocracy which they had so miserably rejected and disgraced. Their story is well told in their own sacred history: "They forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He de-

livered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings nor from their stubborn way." They had shown themselves unworthy of the theocracy. They had grown weary of the theocracy. They asked a king. And God gave them a king.

Yet the transition was not abrupt. Preparation had been made for it in previous time. The administration of the last two Judges wore much the appearance of a settled and ordinary magistracy. In Eli the office of judge was held by the High Priest. Samuel seems to have succeeded him without an interval, and he established and maintained a regular system in the discharge of his official functions. "He went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house, and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the Lord." Plainly, his orderly and systematic rule was something quite unlike the

rude, wild exercise of power by Gideon, or Jephthah, or Samson. He was the agent of God in effecting the transition when the time had come for it, and the first king, selected, according to the low standard of the national ideas, more for physical stature, strength, and comeliness, than for any higher qualities, was never intended to be the progenitor of a sacred line and the ancestor of the Messiah; but rather by his frenzied misrule to teach the nation their folly, that "they might perceive and know that their wickedness was great in asking them a king." David is the true beginning of the Hebrew monarchy, the forefather of a line of whom Christ came, that "King that should reign and prosper" in a higher sense than any earthly sovereign, the King who is at once "the Lamb of God" and "the lion of the tribe of Judah;" who, while He came "meek and sitting upon an ass," has "upon His head many crowns," and "on His vesture and upon His thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." In this line of kings the divine foresight of Moses finds its true object: "When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee whom the Lord thy God shalt choose; one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee; thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt,

to the end that he should multiply horses; forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests, the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord, his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand or to the left; to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel." So precisely and minutely was the law of the kingdom laid down long before its establishment, by that divine wisdom and love which, in yielding to the perverse desire which called for it, would avert, so far as might be, the evils likely to follow in its train. Alas! how poor a copy of this divine pattern were most of the kings of the line of David; from Solomon, whose Egyptian alliance, and polygamy, and vast accumulations of wealth, and forgetfulness of God's law, set the evil example, the imitation of which went on through his degenerate descendants, to the close. The warnings and prohibitions of the prophecy display unmistakable signs of a divine provision, so accurately do they picture forth the dangers to which the kings of

Israel would be exposed, and the actual evils which their history portrays.

Whether their privileges are a real benefit to us, and meet with a due appreciation and improvement by us or not, depends not so much on their essential and inherent value as upon our capacity and disposition to apprehend and use them. Surely no people on the earth were ever so favored as Israel was in having God in so close and intimate a relation to them as He was under the theocracy, to take the immediate direction of their affairs and order all things for them with an infallible wisdom and goodness, free from all the errors of judgment and defects of ability which must attend on any earthly guidance. And yet they thought the theocracy not good for them, and it was not. It was better than anything that could be substituted for it in itself, as much better as a divine thing is than anything human. But in order to get from it the good it offered, they needed to be raised to a higher plane of spirituality than they were willing to maintain. They must be spiritually-minded men, and their God must be to them a present and living reality, the God with whom they daily and hourly had to do. This they did not like, and would take no pains to attain or preserve it. And without it the theocracy was *not* a blessing to them. Nay, it became a disadvantage, for while it did not confer upon them its own special benefits, it did serve to intercept the benefits of that far inferior rule of which it took the place. They grew weary of it. It was distasteful

to them. Anarchy, discord, continual commotions, which there was no adequate human power to restrain, and which, in accordance with its laws, it could not interfere to remedy, swallowed up the nation, and drove it on toward barbarism and wretchedness. They petitioned for its abrogation, and God, in pity not more than in anger, withdrew from them that which they knew not how to appreciate and improve, and granted them in its stead that which their weakness and wickedness rendered fitter for their wants. To thrust this blessing upon them any longer was only to cast pearls before swine, to increase their responsibility and guilt, and open a door to a flood of practical evils. So our Saviour, when on earth, taught the people in parables, because they were not yet able to bear the plainer disclosure of truth, that he might relieve them of the sin of rejecting truths which yet were precious, and, as subsequently explained, are a source of instruction and blessing to the Church till the end of time.

Israel is our warning, my brethren, "to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted;" our warning, as in every stage of their history, so perhaps somewhat specially in this. Alas! how ready are we to reject God to follow after the "devices and desires of our own hearts"! He seeks, in his Church, wherein he has made us, as Israel was, his peculiar people, to be to us a God near at hand, and not a God afar off; to guide us with his eye, protect us with his hand, and rule us with his light and easy yoke. But we do not

like this proximity, this intimacy, this interference. We prefer a God whom we may worship with a stately veneration, a dignified homage, a cold and formal service. Such nearness makes us too painfully sensible of our weakness, sinfulness, and dependence. We would fain interpose between us and him some worldly mediation better suited to our worldly nature and unsanctified inclinations, and to derive from it the maxims that are to fashion our conduct, and the solaces that are to relieve our grief; to desert "the fountain of living waters and hew out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water;" to say to ourselves, "Nay, but a king shall reign over us"—fashion, opinion, interest, some earthly standard of goodness and virtue, when "the Lord our God is our King." To what else is due the low rate of religious feeling and action even among those who, we would fain believe, are aiming to make conscience the guide of their ways? Surely the lives of most Christians are not apparently those of men whose souls are pervaded by a constant recognition of God as their ruler and guide, their father, benefactor, and portion. This disposition to get away from God, and be like the nations around us, how pervading, how strong, how influential it is in the Church of God! And God lets us have our way, and therefore we are poor, feeble, dwarfish Christians. He gives us our desire, and sends leanness withal into our souls.

II.

SAUL.

And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.—I. SAM. IX: 2.

THIS is that first king of Israel, of whom God, by the mouth of Hosea, said, "I gave thee a king in mine anger and took him away in my wrath,"—the giving and the taking away alike a token and a fruit of his displeasure. Yet, doubtless, the time had come where a change in the civil polity of Israel was expedient, if not indispensable. The pure theocracy under which they at first lived was the noblest form of government ever bestowed on men. But to its salutary working, a correspondent nobleness was needful on the part of its subjects. This Israel had lost. Faith and love, the true principles of loyalty, had grown weak in them. They no longer saw "Him that is invisible." They no longer felt the pressure of his guiding and controlling hand. The spiritual was fading, the material was gaining the mastery. They were getting to be altogether unfit to be ruled by an invisible Master, whose laws were written in their hearts. They desired a visible monarch and a spoken mandate, instead of

the vision of the seer and the mystic gleam of the Urim and Thummim. The pillar of fire that had led them through the wilderness had retired within the curtains of the inner tabernacle, and was hidden from their view. They needed an earthly head, whose presence they could recognize and honor, and whose behests they could hear and heed. The want of such a head placed them, as they thought, in unfavorable contrast with the peoples about them, who seemed to them to enjoy a more compact, vigorous, and efficient nationality under their respective kings and rulers. They asked of Samuel a human sovereign to judge them in peace and lead them in war. Such a one, they thought, would add to their national dignity and power. And being such as they were, their thought was right. They had made themselves unfit to be governed directly by God; it was better that they should be ruled by a human vicegerent, who, if he were wise and religious, could interpret God to them, and be a mouthpiece to utter to them his will. They came to Samuel and said, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations." Alas! how has this hankering to be like the world clung to the Church of God, to be rid of the singularity which makes them a peculiar people, and be, in garish show and ensigns of outward glory, a kingdom coming with observation instead of a kingdom not of this world. This spirit in the Church it is that has culminated in the Popedom, this worldly longing after a visible head. The Lord, by his servant Samuel granted the request—how often are men

punished by letting them have their way!—and he gave them a king in Saul, the son of Kish, of whom our text gives us a description. You will perceive that his qualifications were physical; he was tall and handsome, a fine specimen of manly beauty, “from his shoulders and upward higher than any of the people,” no goodlier man among the children of Israel; not a word is said about his qualities of mind and heart, of his intellectual, moral, or religious attributes. There is irony in the choice. The people want visible, material grandeur in their head. They have it. Their king is a perfect animal. And yet it were injustice to Saul not to recognize in him higher qualifications which, rightly used, might have made him a useful and honored monarch. He had patriotism and courage, and some just conceptions of his duty and work as a sovereign. And he had warm affections. Nay, it was this very warmth of love that soured, at last, under disappointment and misapprehension, into a jealous malignity. Saul is not a man to be looked upon with abhorrence so much as with commiseration—a victor even more than an offender. So chosen and so endowed, he began well and brilliantly, and with good promise of permanent usefulness and success. Alas, that the hope was blasted in the bud! and so this bright morning of his reign led on to nothing better than misrule, frenzy, presumption, and suicide, so that in the end God, as he had given him in his anger, “took him away in his wrath.”

Saul was the elder of the two sons of Kish, a wealthy land-holder and herdsman of the tribe of Benjamin. He seems to have partaken of that warmth and energy of disposition, so capable of being stirred into fierceness and violence, which is ascribed to the tribe in the prediction, "Benjamin shall raven as a wolf." His early life passed quietly, with no recorded incidents, in the ordinary avocations of husbandry. He seems to have just reached manhood, when, while out on the errand of seeking his father's asses that had gone astray, he encountered the prophet Samuel, who announced to him the astounding intelligence that he was divinely designated to be the king of his people,—a communication which the prophet confirmed by anointing him and requiring for him from others acts of homage and distinction. And then "God gave him another heart," not a moral renovation, not a change of the will and affections toward God and his service, but such an elevation and expansion of mind as would fit him for the new sphere of action on which he was called to enter. The horizon of his views enlarged. He felt the springing of new aims, hopes, and purposes within him. He awoke to the consciousness of powers and capabilities which had before lain dormant. He was transformed inwardly as his position and relations in the social state were altered; and, made a king, he became kingly. Such changes in men, as their external condition changes, may come without a miracle; and perhaps no man thoroughly knows what is in

him till its hidden and unnoticed seeds are quickened into life by circumstances, and then he may become as much a wonder to himself as to the beholders. But here a special divine element entered into the transformation, and made it more striking and complete. Meeting now a company of prophets, the divine afflatus seized him, and he prophesied with them,—proof to him that a special power of the Spirit of God was resting upon him. He is now led by Samuel to Mizpeh, and there publicly inaugurated. He was as yet modest and unsophisticated. When he was first informed of the high destiny that awaited him, he had pleaded his insignificance: “I am a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family, the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin;” and now that the time of his public inauguration has come, he is found shamefacedly “hidden among the stuff.” But he is drawn forth and presented to view. And when the people saw his comeliness and his stature, that there was none like him among them, they shouted and said, “God save the King.” Yet, with all the budding hopes and aspirations that were stirring in his bosom, he quietly went home without affecting pomp, or putting forth authority. There went with him a band of men whose hearts God had touched. But the children of Belial said, “How shall this man save us?” And they despised him and brought him no presents. But he held his peace, and waited patiently and modestly the occasion that was to call his kingly powers into action, and vindicate his suffi-

ciency for his office. That occasion ere long came. The Ammonites assaulted the frontier city of Jabesh gilead, and reduced it to extremities. In their distress, the people bethought themselves of their youthful sovereign, and appealed to him for help. He promptly put himself at the head of the body of men, perhaps that very band whose hearts God had touched, and marched to their relief. The aid was timely and effectual. The enemy were worsted and fled ; and the emancipated town, mindful of its debt to Saul, repaid it years afterwards by taking down his dishonored body from the wall of Bethshan, and giving it honorable burial. The exploit fully vindicated his capacity to reign, and silenced the voice of doubt and discontent. The people were now ready to put to death the men of Belial that had spoken lightly of him, but the magnanimity of Saul rescued them from their danger. The nation assembled at Gilgal and "renewed the kingdom" to him by a sacred investiture, "and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly." He was now at the top of popularity and influence, and set himself vigorously to the work of delivering his country from the power of the Philistines, by whom, in the days of confusion that preceded his reign, it had been ravished and impoverished. But alas ! this zenith of his prosperity in his life sowed the seed of his subsequent misery and ruin. The Philistines were encamped in Michmash, and Saul and his forces waited in Gilgal till Samuel, according to his appointment, should come to offer a sacrifice and

invoke the divine blessing on their enterprise. Samuel delayed his coming, and the impatient, headstrong king, flushed with victory and eager for the fight, usurped the prophet's office and offered the sacrifice himself. Soon Samuel came; and then fell from his lips the fatal words which ever after rankled like a poisoned arrow in the heart of the unhappy king: "Now thy kingdom shall not continue; the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart . . . to be captain over his people." Still the tide of success was not arrested, though in it all he carried with him the gnawing pain of the prophet's warning. "Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines; and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them;" and he "delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them." He was a splendid monarch, shining in the light of an uninterrupted series of martial successes. But *now*, a second offence was to deepen his crime and his trouble. By the command of God he waged against Amelek a war of extermination. He was successful in the conflict; but, it might seem less out of tenderness than of pride, he saved Agag, the king of Amelek, who had fallen into his hands, alive, to grace his triumph by the display of a royal captive. But again the stern voice of that faithful mentor, who had brought him to the throne and had watched his proceedings since with a loving and anxious eye,

uttered God's displeasure and condemnation in his ears: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he also hath rejected thee from being king." The smitten king was sad, but his was no true repentance, only that "sorrow of the world that worketh death." Samuel came no more near him, but he long continued to mourn for him, for he still stood before his mind's eye the comely, modest, hopeful youth whom he once had learned to admire and love. From this time forward Saul fell into melancholy and fitful moods. The elasticity of his spirit was broken. The stimulus of hope was gone. The shadow of doom hung over him. "An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." Some demon with God's leave took advantage of his weakness to haunt and torture him. Henceforth it is difficult to say how far his exorbitances and extravagances of action were the acts of a responsible being.

To soothe and cheer him, David, the youthful son of Jesse of Bethlehem, a skillful player on the harp, was sent for to come to the court, and soon with his sweet music and winning ways won his affection and became his favorite. But when David's marvelous exploit in slaying Goliath of Gath drew forth from the women of Israel the song, "Saul slew his thousands and David his ten thousands," the demon of jealousy took possession of Saul's heart, and love

turned to bitter enmity. He saw his star waning before the rising luminary; and he saw in David that "man better than he," whom God had destined to possess his forfeited throne. "Jealousy is the rage of a man." "Jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are as coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." Henceforth dread of David became the ruling passion of his life, to which all the outrages and excesses into which he fell are attributable. It had become a mania, under the influence of which his reason was upset, and all things were distorted and perverted. It haunted him incessantly, and with a few intervals of sanity and affectionateness drove him on to his untimely death. He attempted to kill his son Jonathan only because he loved David. He slew the priests of the Lord only because they had received David. In vain David behaved himself with exemplary modesty, prudence, forbearance, and generosity. The heart of the king was not softened toward him. He drove him to dwell in caverns and to associate with outlaws. He chased him "like a partridge on the mountains." He forced him to take refuge in a strange land. Nothing would appease his enmity or check his rage. At last the catastrophe came. The Philistines spread themselves out in the northern part of the kingdom, and the poor, disheartened, and despondent monarch was compelled to take the field against them. No prophet brought him a word of encouragement. Urim and Thummim yielded him no response. In his desperation he goes to the

Witch of Endor, some necromancer who pretended to pry into the secrets of the invisible world by communion with the spirits of the dead. Samuel, beyond her thought, comes to her incantation; but his message to the tortured monarch is, "To-morrow shalt thou be with me." On that morrow the battle was joined on "the mountains of Gilboa," and Israel fled before the enemy. Saul, wounded and deserted at the close of the battle, asks of his armor-bearer the poor boon of putting an end to his life; and, when refused, takes his sword, falls upon it, and dies by his own act.

Two or three lines of thought are suggested by our subject, which we will briefly follow.

An early and sudden elevation is full of danger to its subject. This was Saul's trial, and it was too much for him. His prosperity was his bane. A rustic youth, suddenly taken from rural occupations to be the head of a nation, and left to the full exercise of irresponsible power, almost immediately invested also with the popularity and *eclat* that wait upon successful military enterprises, a king and a conqueror, it is not strange that he grew heady and high-minded, impetuous, arbitrary, and impatient of control, expecting all to bow before him, and brooking no resistance of his will. Nothing but deep religious principles, such as would teach him his true position as the servant and instrument of a supreme will, whose behests it was his to honor and obey, could operate as a sufficient counterpoise to these baneful influences, and keep him humble and gentle. Alas! in

Saul these were wanting. Hence, the precipitancy that would not brook the prophet's delay, and the presumption that dared to intrude into sacred functions and in the threat that it called forth, planted the sting into his soul that turned him into a madman and a persecutor. The maturer judgment and more chastened feeling that time and experience bring, even when religion does not exert its restraining and subduing power, might have saved him from his awful fate. That is safe eminence into which a man grows by degrees, whose successive increments, gradually attained, are less felt, and so are less liable to engender pride and lead to unbecoming exhibitions and excesses. Greatness so gained may be worn safely and gracefully. "Behold," says Habakkuk, "his soul that is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." If that counterbalancing, regulating faith be there, all is safe. But "pales set upon an high place can never stand against the wind;" and what but weak and unstable palings are young men, suddenly lifted into the high places of society, without firm and well-settled principles, there to encounter the winds of passion and pride, of adulation and self-interest, and, in the irresistible onset, sure to be blown down into wreck and ruin. Seek not high things for thyself prematurely, but rather seek patiently the qualifications that shall fit thee for high things, if God shall assign them to thee.

Guard against the influence of jealousy. No temper of mind is more wretched and pernicious, more

painful to the individual, more unjust to others. It is a creative and prolific feeling, and brings in its train a host of evils whose name is legion. Crowds of imaginary troubles spring up under its power, and those that have any substance and reality are frightfully magnified and exaggerated; trifles grow into monsters, and the life is haunted with spectres of its own creation that go with it into all its walks, till the soul becomes "a miry sea that cannot rest," and dwells in an atmosphere of universal mistrust and suspicion. See all this forcibly exemplified in the case of Saul. When once the thought had entered his mind that David was his destined successor, the innocent young man, exemplary and long-suffering, as he was in all the duties of a son-in-law and a subject, became an object of continual suspicion. In the eyes of the unhappy king, he was transformed into an intriguing supplanter, and all his words and motions became indications of sinister designs. His own virtuous and faithful son grew in his estimation to be a plotter against his throne and life. And the priests of God were changed into a band of conspirators, linked with the son of Jesse in his aspirations. He could trust no one; he could see nothing as it really was; everything became to him an omen of approaching rebellion. His fancies became realities; and he dwelt in a world of imaginary wrong and horror, crazed and frenzied by his own distempered thoughts. To such excesses of jealous feeling we may not be liable. Our situation may not furnish its incentives or occasions. Still in

its lower measures it is apt to infest human hearts. It is, in fact, a natural product of self-love, always ready to think itself assaulted, or defrauded of its just demands, and wherever it is, it is a fruitful seed of "envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness." It makes the man a self-tormenter, and a tormenter of others. Let us guard against its insidious approaches and sedulously cultivate, as the best protection against it, the charity that "thinketh no evil;" and while we are careful not to "think of ourselves above what we ought to think," think soberly, be "patient toward all men," and "not easily provoked."

Finally it should be evident to us that the only true foundation for solidity and stability in a human life is the fear and love of God firmly fixed in the soul. Without it, "men of high degree are vanity," and all men, in whatsoever conditions, ill-prepared to bear themselves with dignity, firmness, and serenity amidst the "changes and chances of this mortal life." This, Saul lacked, and so, with many qualities of person and mind that might have made him useful, honored, and happy, lost himself, and made melancholy shipwreck, becoming in the end like a helmless vessel, "driven with the wind, and tossed" on a "raging wave of the sea, foaming out his own shame." If we would be truly noble, truly successful, truly virtuous, truly beneficent, truly good, we must dig deep and lay our foundation on a rock, the rock of a firm trust in God, a humble reliance on his mercy, a love of his name and ser-

vice, and a conscientious conformity to his will. Then let the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon our house—it will not fall, for it is founded upon a rock. In all time of our prosperity we shall be meek; in all time of our tribulation, tranquil.

III.

DAVID.

The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people.—I. SAMUEL XIII: 14.

THIS is lofty praise; what praise indeed could be loftier, what better thing can be said of a man than that he is a man after God's own heart? The subject of this praise is David, in whom whatever warrants its bestowment must therefore have inhered, because as it is divine praise it cannot be erroneous or extravagant. It is the judgment of one who looks not in the outward appearance, but tries the reins and the heart. How often we meet in Scripture with such expressions as "righteous before God." What God pronounces a man to be, that he is.

But in what sense was David a man after God's own heart? Certainly he was not a faultless man, and in one act of his life he was guilty of a crime of flagrant enormity. Some may say he was specially dear to God as a ruler, maintaining His worship in its purity amidst abounding idolatry, preserving his subjects, to the extent of his power, from the taint of heathenism, and ruling them by the principles and maxims of God's revealed laws; being thus in all

governmental matters a model king, such a king as God would have a king to be. But this seems a very insufficient answer. It is not easy, and it is not right thus to separate the magistrate from the man, and praise the ruler in his rule simply, whose own life is a contradiction of the principles he enforces upon others. We must look deeper for the grounds of this divine praise, and I think, if we look candidly at the case of David, they will not be very hard to find, and at the same time extenuate his faults in setting them forth, while we do not candidly make it evident that he furnishes no just occasion for the scoff of the infidel or the perplexity of the believer.

If, then, we find a man who habitually cherishes the fear and love of God in his heart, sets God before him and lives under a sense of responsibility to Him, trusts in His goodness, honors His government, and loves His service, and who, if sometimes "through the weakness of his mortal nature" and the force of temptation, he is betrayed into sin, even though it be in some of its more heinous and offensive forms, turns to God with "a hearty repentance and true faith," and labors with earnest diligence to "cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," and "recover himself out of the snare of the devil," such a man is certainly a man after God's own heart, both in the general tenor of his life and in his repentance for his sins, for in both he is what God would have him to be, what God enjoins and approves, *that* God by whom all sincere and hearty service is graciously accepted, and "a broken and con-

trite heart is never despised." That such a man was David, no one who reads his history with fairness and candor can question. Thus, then, he was a man after God's own heart, such a man as God would have men to be, both before his fall as after it. Such a man is far more after God's heart, more accordant with His mind and taste, than a man who has never done anything very bad in his life and never done anything that is very good, a man of dry proprieties and decencies, whose morality is the fruit of amiability, or education, or calculation, and whose religion, if he professes any, is theory and routine, ceremony and punctilious observance. "Verily, verily," said our Saviour to some just such people, "the publicans and harlots enter the kingdom of heaven before you." The publican went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee. This latter sort of goodness has no spirituality; the former, albeit it has some bad blot upon it, is instinct with life, and it may be, life of a high order.

When Saul died on Mount Gilboa, the throne of Israel became virtually empty. Jonathan, his son, perished in the fight. David was the nation's favorite, and the hearts of the people spontaneously turned to him as their defender and leader. A section of the nation under the lead of Abner, who was Saul's cousin, set up Ish bosheth, the surviving son of Saul, as their sovereign, and he maintained an authority which seems to have been little more than nominal over a considerable territory for two years at Mahanaim, on the east side of the Jordan. David

with his customary forbearance toward the family of Saul, left him unmolested. But Abner's zeal when he was reproved by Ish-bosheth for presuming to take to him a concubine of the deceased sovereign, grew cold, and in vengeance he transposed his allegiance to David. With Abner all the strength of Ish-bosheth's reign departed, and soon two officers of his army, thinking, but mistakenly, to ingratiate themselves with David by their treacherous act, assassinated him as he lay sleeping in his bed. The whole nation now cordially united in recognizing David as their sovereign, and anointed him king at Hebron, where he had thus far kept his court. Soon after he took Jebus, which after the original conquest had fallen again into the hands of the Gentiles. In boastful confidence in the strength of their defenses, the inhabitants placed upon the ramparts the lame and the blind, as though such as these would be competent defenders against David's forces. But this insulting boast of the sufficiency for their defense of the lame and the blind, which was hated of David's soul (in indignation at this silly act of derision and defiance), proved but an empty scoff. The city was taken, received the new name of Jerusalem, and became henceforth the capital of the kingdom. "So David went on and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him."

But we must, to do David justice, turn back to his early days. David was the son of "Jesse the Bethlehemite," born at Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah, to which he belonged, a city which, though

“little among the thousands of Judah,” the birth of his greater son in after days should render forever illustrious. In his descent from “Ruth, the Moabitess,” and more remotely from Rahab, the Canaanite, there seems to be early foretokenings of the breadth and comprehensiveness of that salvation which this son in the fullness of time should bring. In his boyhood he kept his father’s sheep at Bethlehem, a circumstance which seems to have furnished him with the pastoral images that abound in his Psalms, notably in the Twenty-third, where he so sweetly sings, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” His skill in music brought him to the court of Saul, where it was employed effectually to soothe the distempered mind of the unhappy monarch, perturbed with remorse and apprehension. How long his stay with Saul was we cannot tell. But we next find him at the court, after a considerable interval, apparently in a very different character, offering himself as the champion of Israel against the gigantic Philistine who had so long insulted the armies of Israel with his challenge to a personal conflict. The change from a boy to the maturity of manhood, and the novelty of the office which he now proposed to take upon himself, so disguised him that the king failed to recognize in the bold warrior that stood before him the pretty minstrel of former days. The manly look and the intrepid bearing of the warrior were too unlike those of the young harper to suggest the idea of their identity. The success of his daring adventure drew upon him the gaze of the

nation, and called forth pæans of praise. Not only was Goliath slain, but the Philistine host was routed and driven from the land. But this applause was gall in the uneasy bosom of the king. It concentrated upon David the dread that before had haunted him vaguely. He did indeed give him his daughter in marriage, as he promised to do, if his championship should prove successful; but it was reluctantly, and with the shuffling evasion of substituting Michal for Merab, whom David chose. Ever after, David was viewed by Saul with aversion and distrust. The romantic friendship of Jonathan, his son, for David served only to whet Saul's fury. Soon David was driven from the court, forced to wander in the wilderness, compelled to dwell in dens and caverns, to associate with bandits, to feign madness, and make a show of disloyalty in foreign lands. Association with him brought danger. Jonathan, on account of his friendship for him, barely escaped death at the hands of his infuriated father. The high-priest and his companion priests died for their kindness to the outcast. His father and mother were forced to leave the pleasant fields of Bethlehem and take refuge in Moab. There were rest and safety for him nowhere, till at last the royal madman died on Mount Gilboa. Through all this trying portion of his life, his patience, prudence, integrity, and generosity were wonderful. If he was not stainless, few could have been so tried with so slight a stain.

But now the scene changes; opposition to him speedily gives way. He soon reigns over all Israel,

and before long conquers the old heathen stronghold of Jebus and establishes his throne at Jerusalem. Here one of his earliest cares was "to find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." He removes the ark from Kirjath-jearim, where it had rested from the days of Eli, and enshrines it on Mount Zion with much pomp and ceremony. He arranges the Temple service and composes for it many divine songs. He organizes his kingdom and puts competent officers in charge of its different districts and departments of service. He spreads his conquest on every side till his dominions approach the dimensions of the territory originally promised to Abraham. He is a glorious king, standing up proudly among the monarchs of the East.

But now the scene is to change once more, and sadly. "In all time of our prosperity good Lord deliver us." The institution of polygamy, so fatal to domestic purity and peace, had already found its way into his royal establishment. But now his unbridled passion leads astray the wife of his faithful servant Uriah, and induces him with hypocritical pretences to plot against his life and take it away.

These would indeed be accounted light offences in an Oriental king, and some such sophistry as this perhaps blinded him to the enormity of his crime. He seems at any rate to have rested in it in calm self-complacency, till the prophet Nathan, with his graphic parable and bold words, "Thou art the man," roused his torpid conscience to action. A

“repentance not to be repented of,” deep, thorough, and effectual, followed; the Fifty-first Psalm is its expression, and this has remained a pattern and a vehicle of penitential devotion to the Church ever since. With such a repentance God is well pleased. God forgave his sin, but its mischiefs were made to follow him all the days of his life, a reminder to himself, a warning to others. It was ordained that the sword should never depart from his house, and surely it never did; the remainder of his days was but a series of calamities, deepening and entwining with one another, till his harassed life goes out at last in domestic strife and treachery. The vile incest of his son Amnon, the murderous revenge of Absalom, the intrigues, and finally the open rebellion of that arch demagogue, his own expulsion from his capital, hasty flight, and exile beyond Jordan, Absalom’s tragical death, the desertion of Ahithophel, the insolence and harshness of Joab, his error in numbering the people, and the severe infliction it brought upon his kingdom, the insurrection of Sheba, the son of Bichri, and, in his decadence and decrepitude, the undutiful ambition of his son Adonijah, and the disloyal complicity of Joab, and of the high-priest Abiathar in that prince’s selfish designs—such an accumulation of troubles shows the fulfillment of God’s threat, that he would raise up to him enemies in his own house, and the sword should never depart from it. But now, “the days drew near that David should die.” His trials, his greatness, his sin, and his suffering all terminate in

that one event that happeneth to all; "denied the desire of his heart to build a house to the honor of God," because "he had shed much blood," "and had made great wars," he occupied much of the last years of his life in gathering means and materials which his son Solomon employed in the erection of the magnificent temple on Mount Zion. "Now these be the last words of David, David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me. He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even morning without clouds, as the grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made me with an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire."

Two most important and instructive lessons appear to be impressively taught by this history.

I. We are never secure against falling into sin, and sin of a very grievous and disgraceful character, and therefore we can only be safe by a life of continual vigilance and prayer. We are never to think that the habit of goodness is so confirmed in us as to render us proof against temptation, or impervious to the fiery darts of the wicked one. Especially is this true if our condition is one of ease and ful-

ness, affording us large opportunities for idleness and self-indulgence. It was not David wandering in the wilderness of Ziph or hiding in the cave of Adullam that fell ; but David living in luxury, and reclining in indolent ease on the roof of his palace at Jerusalem. A long continuance in virtue is no certain protection against evil doing. If it puts us off our guard, and it often does, it becomes a special liability to transgression. The case of David is not singular. Most of the pecuniary misdoings for which our age is rather remarkably distinguished occur in cases where they were least expected. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." St. Peter, loudest and quickest in his master's service, most confident of his firmness, most resentful of a suspicion of his stability, was the one that deserted him the most shamefully.

" Beware of Peter's word,
Nor confidently say,
I never will deny thee, Lord ;
But, Grant I never may."

"Happy is the man that feareth alway." "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." That was first said to Peter ; but surely it is also said to us, and with as much reason. Let us look at this case of David. It is in many ways monitory and profitable. David had emerged from a long series of trials and troubles, and had arrived at the acme of earthly felicity and distinction. His country had attained a strength and honor it had never known before, and

to his powers and sagacity it owed its elevation. He was regarded as the nation's savior, almost its father. His enemies had disappeared. His government was well ordered and secure. The city which his arms had taken, under his wise and liberal sway had become wealthy and beautiful. The stately palace he had inhabited, he had built for himself according to his own mind. His name was without a stain, and he had confidence in his own virtuous principles and purposes. An evil thought arose in his mind. He did not put it away, but gave place to it. It was fostered by "the lust of the eye." There were sophistries at hand to blind him to the heinousness of his growing purpose. He was an Oriental monarch. Matrimonial ties were not wont to be much revered by Oriental kings, and the lives of their subjects were looked upon as theirs, to keep or destroy, and so he could hypocritically say, with no just sense of the heinousness of his act, "The sword devoureth one as well as another," as though Uriah had simply fallen by the chances of war, when his death had been contrived by Joab at his instigation. Alas, for the deceitfulness of sin! How many are "the crafts and assaults of the devil!" The sin is committed, and the conscience, drugged with such miserable opiates, lies torpid and silent. My brethren, when you suspect sin in aught that you desire or contemplate, be slow to listen to specious pleas and arguments in its defense, or ingenious palliations of its criminality. It is always safe to presume that the scruple is right, and the

defense insufficient. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." Be not over confident of your own steadfastness, especially when things go well with you, and let your daily prayer be, according to your Lord's command, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

II. Sin forgiven leaves a sting behind. Men have not done with their wicked deeds when they have obtained pardon for them. The pardon is sure upon real repentance. "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord, and Nathan said unto David, The Lord hath put away thy sin." But was David therefore done with his sin? Had absolution wiped it out as with a sponge, so that his future life should be as though the sin had never been? That future life gives a melancholy answer to the question. Alas, what a tormented and uncomfortable life it was! How he was made to possess his former iniquities to his dying day! So God told him it should be, and so it was. Lust and cruelty were his sin, and lust and cruelty were his punishment. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Was there not an image of his concupiscence in the incestuous outrage of Amnon on his sister Tamar, and of his cruelty to the other in the murderous retaliation of Absalom? His household became the scene of horrible crime and frightful disorder. Amnon outrages Tamar, Absalom kills Amnon, and when he is half pardoned by his father's doting affection, he still remains dissatisfied and restless.

Soon he concocts rebellion under a plausible pretence of zeal for the rights of the people, who are first made discontented by his artful insinuations, and are then conciliated by his liberal promises, till they are drawn into treason under his banner. Ahithophel, David's trusted and able adviser, has *his* private grudge to satisfy; for he is the grandfather of Bathsheba, who had been the wife of Uriah, and has not forgotten her wrongs; and so, to wreak his cherished vengeance, he joins Absalom's rebellion, and when the enterprise fails, goes home and commits suicide, and becomes a lively type of the traitor Judas. David is dethroned for the time, and is again a fugitive as of old. The rebellion is suppressed; but the rough hand of Joab seals the peace in the blood of Absalom, who, with all his faults and misdeeds, is still his father's darling, and the terrible death of his favorite son wrings the king's heart with anguish. David is again seated on his throne, but there is no peace for him there. His vanity leads him to number the people, and a distressing pestilence follows. Sheba rises in rebellion against his authority and disturbs his kingdom. And, finally, just as his last sands are running out, and Solomon, divinely designated, is placed upon the throne to be his successor, Adonijah sets up a rival interest; Joab, though rough, hitherto faithful to his master, joins the revolt; the high-priest, Abiathar, who had been the sharer of his fortunes in all their changes heretofore, goes with Joab to the chief powers in the State and in the Church, these all combine

to thwart his will, and his sun goes down in turmoil and disorder. What bitter fruits of a forgiven sin !

My brethren, "fools make a mock at sin." They are fools that do. Say not, "God is merciful and forgives sin." So he does, but "there is mercy with him that he may be feared." No man does any serious wrong that does not atone for it by suffering. If there be no direct inflictions of Providence, he cannot blot the memory of it out of his mind. It always remains a part of his history to be thought of with shame and sorrow. And he cannot help seeing its injurious effects, which are oftentimes extensive and lasting; and looking upon this and that mischief as its fruit, he cannot refrain from saying to himself, This is my work. A drunkard may reform, but if his bad example has made his children drunkards, and brought degradation upon his family, his reformation will not restore them. A debauchee may reform, but the victims of his wickedness still cry out against him, as the author of their ruin and misery. A man cannot cut himself off from his past. An enfeebled constitution, a tarnished reputation, a shortened life, are often the consequences of some long-past, perhaps disregarded transgression; and to the last "his bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust." How much reason have we to pray, "Oh, remember not against us our old sins." And how true is it in human experience that godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

IV.

SOLOMON.

Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin.—NEHEMIAH XIII: 26.

SOLOMON is an enigma, and an enigma that perhaps is not capable of an altogether satisfactory solution. I shall adopt the theory that seems to me, on the whole, the most consistent and reconcilable with the seemingly conflicting facts. Scripture does not aid us here, as in the case of most of the kings, by an infallible testimony concerning him, saying, in so many words, in a summary of his life that he did that which is right, or that which is evil, in the sight of the Lord. It leaves us to draw our conclusion from the facts which it sets before us. Let us advert to these facts as they are written for our learning.

Our text declares of Solomon that he “was beloved of his God.” And the author of the first book of Kings tells us “that Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father.” And though the latter expression is perhaps descriptive rather of a particular portion of his life, than of its whole, it would certainly appear to

indicate a character in its beginning and outset in some good degree under the influence of religious faith and feeling. His prayer for wisdom at the entrance of his reign breathes a spirit of deep humility, and of childlike simplicity and trust. No young monarch could have entered upon a great trust like his more worthily or becomingly. God accorded to him an answer "above all that he could ask or think." "Because thou hast asked this, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words; lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall arise any like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast *not* asked, both riches and honor; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways to keep my statutes and commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days." Yet it is noticeable that in this prayer, right and noble as it is, there is expressed no deep sense of sin or moral evil. It is not evidently the deep cry of a soul that feels its sinfulness and spiritual impotency, and longs above all things for mercy and grace to help. "The conscience is not yet, so far as one can see, fully awake and groaning under its burden. Perhaps in this was the defect that explains the ambiguity of his sub-

sequent course. Yet his prayer at the dedication of the Temple is full of the loftiest spirit of faith and devotion,—the noblest utterance of the creed of Israel, setting forth the distance and yet the nearness of the eternal God, one, incomprehensible ; dwelling not in temples made with hands, yet ruling men ; hearing their prayers ; giving them all good things, wisdom, peace, righteousness.” He was, too, the author of inspired Scripture, and his writings indicate a perception of the true principles of duty and God’s service. Yet a bright morning that promised the best thing was soon sullied ; and if the noon is brilliant, it shines with a sickly and pretentious glare, and not with the clear, full radiance of the sunlight that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The life of Solomon, in its general aspect, as it is portrayed to us in Scripture, is sadly like that of a worldling and a voluptuary. We do not discover, indeed, that the sense of God and his claims ever wholly forsook him ; but if the good seed still grew, it was among thorns, so surrounded with “cares and pleasures of this life” as to mature no excellent fruit. Luxury and splendor blinded his eyes and hardened his heart. The ambition of filling the position of a great Oriental monarch took possession of his mind, and seems to have become his paramount and overmastering passion. “The lust of the eyes, and the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life” engrossed his soul, and left little room in it for graver and higher aspirations. He must needs imitate the magnificent

sovereigns on either side of him, and lack nothing in his own case that went to swell the state of the kings of Assyria and Egypt. He allied himself to paganism for political advantage and factitious honor by marrying the daughter of Pharaoh, and by erecting at Jerusalem a magnificent palace for her accommodation; and he allowed her, as the most inevitable consequence, to enjoy the luxury of her own superstition, and so heathenism was soon enthroned in state in his capital. And together with the daughter of Pharaoh of Egypt, King Solomon loved many strange women, "women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites," "and his wives turned away his heart after their gods," if not to worship them himself, at least to provide costly and gorgeous fanes for them, to gratify these outlandish women, and countenance and favor their worship. Thus soon his domestic life became encumbered with an overgrown seraglio, and the Mount of Corruption, just outside the walls of Jerusalem, became a pantheon, where the idolatries of all the neighboring races were honored with cost and magnificence. Wealth and power, the means of unlimited indulgence, love of luxury and display, had intoxicated him, shut out God and spiritual interest from his soul, and rendered him an idolater, or at least an abetter and supporter of idolatry. And here the direct testimony of history leaves him with all the bright auguries of his early life hidden under a dismal eclipse. But there remains a composition of his, written apparently toward the close

of his life which opens a door for the hope that at evening time there was light in his day. In it he recites the experience of his life, how that, after gathering around him every means of gratification the world could afford, he found all but vanity and vexation of spirit, "and that in the awful distortion of domestic ties into which his swollen polygamy had betrayed him," a woman among ten thousand had he not found. And at last the moral of his life and experience comes out in the conviction that to "fear God and keep his commandments is the all of man," his whole end, his whole duty, his whole wisdom, and his whole happiness. To this better mind then he seems to have returned at last, and in it we may hope found peace with Him, who "passeth by the transgression" of the remnant of his heritage, and "retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy."

"Star of the East, how sweet art Thou,
Seen in life's early morning sky,
Ere yet a cloud has dimmed the brow,
While yet we gaze with childish eye.

"Too soon the glare of earthly day
Buries to us thy brightness keen,
And we are left to find our way
By faith and hope in Thee unseen.

"What matter if in calm old age
Our childhood's star again arise,
Crowning our lonely pilgrimage
With all that cheers a wanderer's eyes?"

In Solomon we think these successive stages are discoverable. In the middle stage of his life, in-

deed, faith and hope became miserably dim; and the star of his youth, when it came again in age, strove with a correspondent feebleness and uncertainty. He could not rise to the height from which he had fallen, or restore the freshness of his first love. The weary soul could only lay again with slow and painful relapses the foundations of a true morality and religion.

Solomon was the son of David by Bathsheba, "who had been the wife of Urias." He was not the oldest, but one of the younger, if, indeed, he was not the very youngest of David's sons. His selection to succeed his father on the throne some have supposed to be owing to the influence of Bathsheba, the favorite wife. There may have been in this preference a desire to make her some amends for the wrongs he had done her when she was the wife of Urias. But whatever minor considerations may have influenced the king, an intimation of the divine will, we must believe, chiefly governed his choice. The name given him, Solomon, the peaceful one, was intended to foreshow his personal character and the character of his reign, as well as to point forward to that "Prince of Peace," of whom in this respect he was typical. Unlike his predecessors, Saul and David, Solomon was *born* a prince, and grew up amidst the elegancies and indulgences of a court and a palace. Of his personal history very few events are recorded; indeed, we may say there were very few events to record. He had no wars and no internal commotions; and it is war and discord that

make history. His reign flowed on with a calm and even current, marked chiefly by great wealth, prosperity, and magnificence. It was the halcyon time of Israel. His father had conquered all the surrounding nations, and he ruled in profound tranquillity over all the country between Egypt and the Euphrates. The great work of his reign was the erection of the temple on Mount Zion, for which David in his lifetime had amassed much of the needful means and materials, a structure which, not for magnitude but for costliness and splendor, was one of the wonderful things of the world. He entered into an alliance with Hiram, King of Tyre, and through him obtained the aid of Phœnician skill and art in his great undertaking; and so carefully and accurately were the parts of the edifice prepared beforehand, that in putting them together "there was no sound of axe or hammer heard." Other edifices under his passion for magnificence rose to adorn Jerusalem. A palace for himself, and one for his Egyptian queen, "the house of the forest of Lebanon," with its magnificent throne of ivory and gold, with six lions on either side supporting the arms of the chair in which he sat to administer justice, "Tadmor in the wilderness," on whose splendid ruins travellers gaze with wonder to this day, and other cities created and adorned by his power, attested the royal builder's fondness for pomp and luxury. Commerce flourished under his patronage. By the port of Joppa, on the Mediterranean, his ships went to Tarshish and participated in the rich gains which Tyre,

his faithful ally, had drawn from traffic with the West. And the ports which he opened on the Red Sea gave him access to India and the eastern shore of Africa, whence he received stores of gold, and many articles of curiosity and value hitherto unknown. His ships brought "gold and silver, ivory and apes, and peacocks," "garments, and armor, and spices, horses, and mules." "Silver was in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars as the sycamore trees that were in the vale for abundance." So King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom; for extent of knowledge, for sagacity, for penetration, for discrimination and governmental skill. Foreign princes sent ambassadors to him, and the Queen of Sheba came to visit him from a far country, drawn by the fame of his wisdom and his riches, and acknowledged that the half had not been told her. For reasons of state he formed matrimonial connections with the neighboring kings. The heathen wives must be allowed the free exercise of their respective religions, and the king's pride must make the provision for them sumptuous and grand. So "outlandish"—that is, according to the primitive meaning of the word foreign—"women caused him to sin." Idolatry stood unreprieved, and even honored, before the eyes of his people. Polygamy, its attendant evil, grew to a monstrous magnitude. Yet under its debarring influence he found no true domestic enjoyment, no realization of the genuine idea of a wife; but was compelled to say that a "woman"—a true woman, with womanly

virtues and utilities—"among ten thousand he had not found." Yet woman was not in fault, but the man. So his life wore on to age, ruffled, indeed, a little toward its close by the turbulence of Jeroboam, which was the foreshadowing of coming troubles. The vast expenses which his costly works involved bore heavily upon the people, and produced the discontent under which the rule of his successor led to the disruption of the kingdom. Luxury and unbounded self-indulgence ate out the heart of his goodness and corrupted his life; and it is but an uncertain glimmer of light in his closing days that saves him from being reckoned among those who "have their portion in this life" and love "the true riches." "And the time that Solomon reigned over all Israel in Jerusalem was forty years. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father; and Rehoboam, his son, reigned in his stead."

The prosperity of Solomon was his great misfortune. Not uncommonly is it so. He was born a prince, and grew up in unrestrained ease and indulgence. In his early life there was no hardship, no self-denial, no struggle; gratification outran want, and assiduity and adulation waited on every wish. What knew he of that stern discipline in which firmness and steadfastness of principle and conviction are most effectually acquired and established? When he came to the throne the wealth his father had amassed fell into his hands. There were no foreign wars to tax his energies, no internal strifes to occupy or dis-

turb his mind. He had abundant leisure to enjoy the good things so profusely furnished to him. His enterprises prospered, and riches flowed into him by his commercial operations from every quarter. A natural taste for beauty and splendor had opportunity to gratify itself to the utmost extent. Rank, wealth, power, in the largest abundance were his. His fame was spread abroad, and the voice of admiration and flattery came to him not only from his own subjects, proud of a sovereign that had made their country great and raised it to a pinnacle of glory among the nations of the world, but from foreign lands. Why should not such a man begin to think himself almost a god? Why should it not be with him as he himself says it was: "Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them. I withheld not my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion of all my labor." Why should he not worship himself, think all offerings due tributes to this self-constituted divinity, all indulgences and delights lawful exercises of his right? This is not an atmosphere in which religion can prosper; if it do not utterly expire, if it continue to live at all, it must move with languid pulse and speak with "bated breath." And yet this is the condition which men, and even Christian men, are wont to think enviable, and strive after as the summit of earthly good. Solomon possessed about all the elements of worldly pleasure, and he used them without stint. And was he happy? Hear his testimony: "I hated life, because the work that is

wrought under the sun is grievous unto me; for all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Knowledge, riches, rank, power, all were a poor and unsatisfactory portion. So much for the result in regard to this world. And his religion,—what had become of that? It had wilted, withered, faded out of sight in this unwholesome atmosphere, given place to a self-idolatry and a most dangerous leaning toward the worship of the gods many that have usurped Jehovah's throne. And yet this worldly prosperity and fulness it is that we are sadly inclined to aim at and labor for in such measure as our circumstances will allow, and to glory in and felicitate ourselves upon so far as we attain to it. Think you that it can do more for us than it did for King Solomon? or that we can escape the snares it spread for his feet? He himself answers with his own monitory question: "What can the man do that cometh after the king?" Who can get more good out of life than I? Who better can avoid its manifold seductions? Learn to look upon prosperity as the state of peculiar danger, then learn where in it to live carefully and warily, to "watch and pray," and "walk humbly" with God. There is no truer wisdom for man than that which breathes in Agur's prayer: "Two things have I required of thee: deny me them not before I die; remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." For of a truth, "godliness

with contentment is great gain," the real riches of this life.

Look at Solomon's fearful perversion of the domestic relations. This appears both in his polygamy and in his intermarriage with foreigners and idolaters.

For the first, he had, indeed, ample precedent and warrant in the example of the greatest and holiest names in the history of the nation, from the father of the faithful down, though never had it reached such swollen proportions as it did in him. So every social evil grows by continuance. The law of God had not as yet declared polygamy unlawful. But the original creation of one man and one woman clearly enough indicated its contrariety to his mind and purpose, and the history of the race had plainly shown it to be the fruitful source of domestic infelicity, discord, and debasement. Surely, in the overgrown extent it reached in Solomon's case, its evils were not diminished, but, we may well believe, fearfully augmented. "A woman he had not found," not one worthy of that name, not one to answer to that beautiful description of a virtuous woman, "pronounced in value above all rubies," which is found in the appendix of his Book of Proverbs. It is hardly possible, indeed, that a true wife should exist in a plurality of wives. Under its baleful influence the wife dwindles into the petted toy, or sinks into the degraded slave, and can never attain to the station of an honored and honorable helper and companion which God designed her to be; and the social

state from being a family becomes an incongruous company of ill-matched souls, that generate in its frictions jealousy, rivalry, and hatred. Let us thank God that under the Gospel this "holy estate" shines forth in its true beauty, and put forth our influence to preserve it from the debasements which the recklessness and "unruly wills" of men are ever threatening to bring upon it.

But the true social economy of life was in Solomon's case still farther perverted by his matrimonial alliances with foreigners ignorant of the true God and "strangers from the covenant of promise." Such alliances were expressly forbidden in God's Word, and it was a direct defiance of his prohibition that he, whose office it was to be the guardian and maintainer of that Word, lived in open violation of its precepts, for pomp and policy. The fruit was the introduction of idolatry into his kingdom, to be practised with all its gorgeous and seductive rights, before the eyes of his people, under his protection and patronage. And the progeny of such ill-assorted matches could hardly fail either to wholly follow the religion of the mother, or rest in some mongrel compromise, like those Jews of Nehemiah's days, who "spake half in the speech of Ashdod and half in the speech of Israel." To guard against a mischief so great, marriages of this character were strictly forbidden to the Israelites. Yet Solomon indulged in them, and they caused him to sin. My brethren, although among us there is no open idolatry, there is much unbelief and mischief, much un-

disguised devotion to the world, much that under decent shapes is really the service of Satan; the relations of life, and none so much as that "holy wedlock," which is the foundation of them all, are sacred things devised of God for our good, and quite too solemn and important to be left at the mercy of passion, or caprice, or fancy, or policy, or worldly gain, or aggrandizement. The apostle's warning has still its force and necessity for us, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," nor with such as scout at religious obligations, or in giddiness and frivolity of mind slight and disregard them. The person so allied comes to be like his yoke-fellow, and then the end is death.

V.

REHOBAM.

So King Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned : for Rehoboam was one and forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.—II. CHRONICLES XII : 13, 14.

ONE incident in the life of Rehoboam, the son and successor of Solomon, so overshadows his whole history as in a sense to engulf and obscure it, and prevent it from receiving any fair and dispassionate estimation. And yet, in spite of that great folly, which has made his name a proverb of unwisdom, as it were, he was, albeit not a godly man or a man of firm and elevated principles of action, not without ability as a ruler, and in administering the affairs of his kingdom he displayed some judgment and achieved some creditable success. His mistake at the outset was indeed incurable, as mistakes often are. Like Esau, "he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." But when the issue of his error became plain, and was confirmed by the decision of God, he submitted to it with a manly fortitude, desisting from all mad attempts to reverse the determination or set it at

defiance, and betook himself, with such skill as a man might who had no true inward fear of God to guide him, to the work of strengthening his diminished realm and promoting its prosperity. For the sacred historian says of him, that "he did wisely, and that under his rule in Judah things went well." His policy drew almost all the priesthood into his dominions of the nation, and brought in large accessions of population from the territory of the revolted tribes; so that though his country, consisting only of the two southern tribes, was inferior in extent, and yet more in fertility and natural resources, it matched well the sister kingdom in the north, and during his reign and the reigns of his successors, he successfully warded off its enmity. "He fortified the strongholds and put captains in them, and store of victual, and of oil and wine. And in every several city he put shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side." So much he did for external defence. And to preserve internal order and tranquillity, and to prevent contention among his numerous sons—for it is recorded of him that he had twenty-eight—as well as to avert the danger of a disputed succession after his death, he separated them, "and dispersed all his children throughout all the countries of Judah and Benjamin, unto every fenced city: and he gave them victual in abundance." Surely, here was some good statesmanship and political sagacity. And thus it appears that Rehoboam, through the great folly with which he

started in his public career, has left on his fame an indelible blot—was not altogether a weak and unprosperous monarch, not altogether a simpleton or a trifler, nor altogether unworthy of his birth as the son of the wise King Solomon. And it has been remarked, as an evidence of shrewdness and sagacious forecast in this king, that the fortresses which he built “were not, as might have been at first sight expected, on the northern frontier against the rival kingdom,” in the quarter where the danger was immediate and manifest, but on the southern and western side of the country toward Egypt, whence, circumstances having broken the bond which united the house of David with the royal family of Egypt by a matrimonial tie, and brought about an alliance of that power with the new king of the new kingdom, a far more formidable danger was not unreasonably apprehended. This was good warlike strategy.

Rehoboam was the son of Solomon and his successor on the throne, inheriting from him the undivided sovereignty of the Hebrew race. His mother's name, as our text tells us, was Naamah, an Ammonitess. To this heathen mother—one of the outlandish women tolerated in the idolatry of her native country by Solomon, like his other foreign wives, whom policy or an affectation of grandeur induced him to assemble at Jerusalem in the dark decline of his life—and to her influence in his training, and indeed to the bad atmosphere of his father's court, thus fatally tainted in the later days of that splendid

reign, his faults may reasonably be in no small degree attributed. There seems to have been a connection between the house of David and that of the kings of Ammon that dated back a considerable distance; and from some obscure intimation, it has been conjectured that David's mother, whose name singularly is nowhere given, had previously been married to Nahash, the Ammonitish king; and also that Zeruiah, who was the mother of Joab and Abishai and Asahel, and Abigail, who was the mother of Amasa, David's distinguished relatives, who played so important a part in his affairs, were the issue of this Ammonitish marriage. It accords with this supposition that David, during his flight from Saul, sought an asylum for his aged parents in the court of Ammon, and that he experienced kindness and help from the same source when he fled across the Jordan from the violence of Absalom. Of this same Ammonitish family Solomon married a daughter, who was thus his relative by blood, and for her accommodation he built an high place for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. Molech, horrid king, was the god whose cruel worship in the valley of Hinnom, right beneath the walls of Jerusalem, made Tophet, as the place was called, a lively image of hell, and has communicated to it its name of Gehenna. Of this Ammonitish idolater Rehoboam was the offspring. Rarely does a good child come from a bad mother, and it has been well remarked that among the kings there is scarcely one known to be the son of a foreign and consequently

idolatrous mother who did not fall into idolatry. Rehoboam was Solomon's favorite son, and selected out of his numerous progeny to be his successor on the throne; and at the death of his father he entered upon the grand inheritance that fell to him without visible opposition, although those seeds of discontent and disaffection were lying hidden in the bosom of the state which were soon to grow up into revolt and dismemberment. Wise management at this critical juncture might have stifled and destroyed them. But at this very point Rehoboam's wisdom failed him. The blunder was fatal. The breach then made was never after healed.

The way to the disruption was paved in his father's lifetime. The closing years of Solomon's reign were oppressive, and the people had grown restive and unquiet under the burdens that rested heavily upon them. A change in the administration offered an inviting opportunity to seek redress of their grievances. The extensive and costly erections, and the sumptuousness of his vast domestic establishment, had not been met by the gains of his wide-spread and lucrative commerce. Taxes had impoverished the country and weighed heavily on its people. Now that the charm of his great name was withdrawn, the smothered discontent burst forth and loudly demanded a hearing. The nation rose up with one voice to ask for a reduction of their burdens and a relief of their grievances, with Jeroboam at their head, who was smarting under a sense of wrongs of his own, as well as swelling with the ambition engen-

dered by a consciousness of ability; they came to Rehoboam at Shechem, where Israel had come to make him king, and said, "Thy father made our yoke grievous: Now, therefore, make the grievous service of thy father and his heavy yoke which he put upon us lighter, and we will serve thee." After promising them an answer at the end of three days, King Rehoboam consulted with the old men that stood before Solomon, his father, while he yet lived, and said, "How do ye advise that I may answer this people? And they spake unto him saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants forever." These were wise men, men of experience and of judgment. They knew the temper of the nation and sympathized with it. They understood the power of gentleness and the efficacy of timely concession. "The tongue of the wise is health;" "a soft answer turneth away wrath," and "a soft tongue breaketh the bone." Well had it been for Rehoboam if he had listened to this judicious counsel. But there were others about the throne whose counsel was *not* wise, men who told him that the course prepared by him was mean and cowardly and unworthy of a king—the weak device of timid old men whose courage and energy were unstrung by age. These young men, who had grown up with him, advised force, the vigorous assertion of prerogative, the high-handed exertion of authority, to crush dissatisfaction by power, and silence complaint by greater exactions; to be like Pharaoh

to their ancestors, require the tale of bricks and withhold the straw. Such counsels have overthrown many a tottering tyranny, and will destroy them all in the end. But they are pleasant and flattering to the ears of power; and where power is, there are sure to be the sycophants to compliment it, and oftentimes to ruin it. And so, at the end of three days, Rehoboam pursued the ruinous behest of his companions, and said to the people, "My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, and I will chastise you with scorpions." "It was of the Lord," the historian tells us, a judicial blindness sent upon the house of David to punish it for its sins. Much of this judicial blindness there is in the world which men do not always recognize, in nations, in individuals, sent too often to chastise and destroy some form of oppression. The blow was struck and it was fatal. "To your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David," was the cry. The ten northern tribes revolted and made Jeroboam their king. The largest and richest portion of the territory was sent away from David's sceptre. A rival throne and temple and hierarchy looked defiance at Jerusalem from the hills of Ephraim. Rehoboam would fain have gone to war to recover his lost possessions, but the Lord forbade him. "Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is of me." It was a bloodless revolution. But one man, 'Adoram," who was over the tribute, called else-

where "Adoniram," in a vain attempt to execute his office in Jeroboam's dominions, fell a victim to popular violence. Rehoboam henceforward acquiesced in his loss. At first he maintained the worship of God in its purity, and for three years they walked in the ways of David and Solomon, but later "he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord." A religion that is merely educational and external has no life and little power of continuance. On the whole, however, Rehoboam was an expert and successful sovereign. He had one war with Shishak, king of Egypt, and was worsted in it. The old alliance was broken. Perhaps it was because Solomon, in designating his successor, preferred the son of his Ammonitish wife before the children of the Egyptian princess whom he had married. Rehoboam was defeated in the conflict, and in the place of the golden shields which Solomon had hung up in the splendid porch of the Temple, of which Shishak robbed him, he put brazen shields, a significant token of a decline from a golden age to an age of brass. He lived to the age of fifty-eight. "And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David, and Abijah his son reigned in his stead."

Not to detain you longer with the historical details of this king's life, I will now proceed to present to your consideration some of the principal points of instruction which it seems to me to contain.

And first it has a lesson for us in regard to the use and employment of human counsels. The capi-

tal error of Rehoboam's life lay in his listening to bad advice, and the error was irreparable. He did not hearken to the sober and judicious recommendations of the grave and considerate men that had stood around the throne of his father, but to the hasty judgments of younger men, who sought rather to please than to advantage him, to make themselves acceptable to him by flattering his vanity rather than useful, by guiding him aright; whose own opinions indeed were crude and superficial, and of little practical value; and so he lost the better half of his kingdom, and transmitted an impoverished sceptre to all his posterity. Here are both warning and direction for us; the Scriptures do not undervalue advice, they give no countenance to that headstrong sinfulness and self-sufficiency that refuses to ask counsel, and rushes on its way without regard to timely admonition and instruction. It says to us, "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety." "With good advice make war." "As an ear-ring of gold and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear." "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." "Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge, but he that hateth reproof is brutish." These are specimens of a numerous class of texts. The point is one on which Scripture is specially plain and emphatic. It was not Rehoboam's fault that he took advice in the untried and difficult art of ruling; but that he took *bad* advice, that he forsook the obvious sources of sound prudence and

policy, and resorted to those whose opinions presented no promise of valuable aid ; that he left the counsel of those whom experience had made sage in the knowledge of men, and the great art of influencing and controlling them, for that of those who enjoyed no advantage over himself in this respect, who themselves had never made trial of the work which they were invited to criticise, and who would be more likely to say what would please him and secure his favor than advance his success and well-being. Counsel is good ; any man that thinks he does not need it is a fool or worse. “Seest thou a man that is wise in his own conceit ? there is more hope of a fool than of him.” Counsel in order to be good must come from a reliable source, a source entitled to respect and confidence, where there is information, where there is integrity, where there is honesty of purpose, where there is unselfish and unbiassed regard to truth and to our real good. Such counsel may not always be palatable, not such as we like or hope for, but in the end we shall either be thankful that we followed it or wish that we had. “He that rebuketh a man shall often find more favor than he that flattereth with his lips.” There is little doubt that Rehoboam soon thought better of his father’s old friends than of his own favorite companions. To go to another to think for us, simply because we are too indolent to think for ourselves, or wish to throw off the responsibility of deciding by quoting a name, is not wisdom. Nor is it wisdom to ask another’s opinion, simply for the pur-

pose of being confirmed in some purpose of our own to which we are strongly inclined or on which we are determined already, and pick out our advisers with reference to that result. Very likely this was Rehoboam's case. He did not wish to diminish his expenses, or curtail anything of his father's luxury, and he was predisposed in favor of opinions that would sustain him in this disinclination. "The wish was father to the thought." The previous bias gave a weight to the counsel which it had not in itself. We are prone to think that wise which we like. If we would have counsel that is good for anything, we must seek it where there is real knowledge, and where we can look for an honest and impartial opinion, and with a sincere purpose to "prove all things" and "hold fast that which is good." There will always be enough ready to tell us what is pleasing, and who very likely have ends of their own to gain by it. These young courtiers desired to bask in the royal favor, to live on court bounty, and gain office and place. Their object was not Rehoboam's good, but their own. The young especially, but all of us in a good degree, are exposed to this danger. Young men will listen to other young men, and adopt their maxims, to "walk in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes," while they will not obey their father's commandment, and forsake the law of their mother, scouting them as antiquated, narrow, cramping, illiberal, and so make shipwreck of all that is good in this life, and of all we hope for in another. Alas! how many such wrecks

bestrew the shores ! There are always sources of good counsel in society, and they are easily discerned. Be not so conceited as to condemn all counsel. Be not so foolish as to seek it where it is not to be found.

Again, we see the irreparable mischief of a wrong choice. When Rehoboam preferred the advice of the young men, he took a step which he could never afterwards retrace, whose mischief admitted of no remedy. Seventeen years he lived and reigned, but he did nothing toward retrieving his mistake. He could not get back his lost dominions, he could not recover his alienated people. He could never be king of Israel. Another bore that title. Jeroboam dwelt in Shechem, the beautiful home of his fathers, and from Bethel, almost in sight of his capitol, the calf challenged its rival on Mount Zion, and all because of a determination formed perhaps in an instant, and of words which it took but a moment to utter. There are crises in the lives of nations and of men on which their future course and character depend, and they are usually compressed into very narrow limits. A moment, and it is an even chance whether we take one course or another ; another moment, and the decision is made which can never be reversed, or its consequences averted. We cannot go back to the point of divergence and revise the determination. It is made and cannot be unmade. We must accept the life it entails upon us, and make the best of it that we can. Such crises run all through life, but they are especially impor-

tant when the young are setting out on their course of independent action, during their path in life, or when some serious change in our condition is placed before us. Then a step taken can never be taken back; and if it be a wrong step, to the end of our life we must vainly sigh, Oh, that I had not done this! Oh, that I had done that! But Esau's tears would not bring back his birthright, and ours will not. Acts are solemn things, specially acts in momentous junctures. And yet how carelessly men act, with how little reflection or forethought, on a momentary impulse, in obedience to a passing thought, a sudden inclination or desire! Life is too serious a thing for men to treat it so heedlessly. Act when you are called to act—and act oftentimes you must, there is no alternative—with deliberation, with calmness, with such wise calculation as you can command, with such judicious counsel as you can call to your aid, above all looking to God by earnest prayer. One of our Lord's titles is "Counsellor." "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God, who giveth to every man liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."

Finally, let us see what was after all Rehoboam's fundamental defect. He had no true religion. He was the maintainer, to be sure, of God's true worship, in opposition to the idolatrous form into which Jeroboam debased it, and he is not directly called an idolater anywhere. For the first three years of his reign his people "walked in the way of David and of Solomon," and doubtless he walked in it with

them. But when he had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him; and it is distinctly said of him that "he did evil because he prepared not his heart to seek God." His "heart was not right in the sight of God," and without this all was "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." There was no religion of the heart; and without this, formality, ritualism, orthodoxy, exact definitions of faith, solemn respect for sacraments, zealous defence and assertion of the truth against errorists, schismatics, and unbelievers avail nothing. They may deceive the man. He may think he is religious. The Athenians, St. Paul said, were very religious. So they were in a sense. The Pharisees were the religious party of our Lord's day, and yet he called them a "generation of vipers." The great question with you, my brethren, is not whether you come here, and are decorous in your worship, and go to the Lord's Table, and give alms of your goods, and maintain a reputable conversation among men; but whether you are new creatures in Christ Jesus, whether as lost sinners you have come in faith and penitence to his cross for pardon, whether in humility and earnestness you are seeking continually the Spirit of Christ to dwell in you and make you alive unto God, and whether that blessed work is begun and going on in your souls which in its issue will make you meet for glory. Holiness is an *inward* thing, for which nothing outward can be a substitute, and without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

VI.

ABIJAH.

Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam began Abijah to reign over Judah.— II. CHRONICLES XIII : I.

ABIJAH was the son of Rehoboam, and his successor on the throne of Judah. His reign was short, for it lasted but three years, and he was one of the evil kings of Judah ; for it is recorded of him that “he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him, and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father.” For David’s sake, therefore, and not for his own, was his throne maintained, and his royal rights defended in his continual conflicts with his neighbor, Jeroboam, for it is recorded of him that there was war between Jeroboam and Rehoboam all his days. The war of his father’s time continued through his ; and so, though Rehoboam was no worse, he yet warred with Jeroboam in the person of his heir ; and of *Abijah* it is said, that “there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life.” An evil inheritance this for a father to transmit to a son, a heritage of feud and enmity and strife ; yet it is an illustrious legacy, if the contest be waged for right and truth and honor. So it seems to have been in this case on Abijah’s part, at least in the

main; but in the course of time its prolongation, when it was no longer necessary and useful, became both impolitic and wicked. And so we shall see Jehosaphat, Abijah's grandson, wisely judged. In this war God gave Abijah victory, but, as the sacred historian is careful to tell us, not for his own sake. He was wicked after the fashion of his father: "Nevertheless for David's sake did the Lord his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem: because David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." As Rehoboam's was a two-sided life, we have found reason to think so seems to have been his son Abijah's. There was little in his short reign of importance to record; but there was in it one memorable incident, and in this he manifested manly heroism, and an appearance certainly of religious faith, whatever may have been his general religious character. This ambiguity probably finds its solution in his descent. His mother, we are told, was the daughter of Absalom, David's rebellious son, more strictly, it might seem, his granddaughter. The author of the Chronicles calls her the daughter of Uriel, of Gibeah. Uriel had married Tamar, the daughter of Absalom, and his only surviving child. And Absalom was the son of David by Maachah, daughter of the king of Geshur, from whom the name descended to the wife of Rehoboam, and mother of Abijah. And with the name

had come, there seems reason to believe, also the heathen taint which this first importation of Gentile blood into the royal stock had brought with it. The turbulent character and wild acts of Absalom may have been the results of this extraction and of maternal training; and in Geshur, at the court of his grandfather, there he took refuge after the murder of his brother Amnon. His daughter Tamar, who bore the name of his injured sister, was the mother of Maachah, Rehoboam's favorite queen and Abijah's mother. Rehoboam loved Maachah above all his wives and concubines; and it is probable, that through her dominant influence the crown was devised to Abijah in preference to his other children. The influence she possessed in her husband's court she preserved during the short reign of her son; and it continued in that of her grandson Asa, who at last broke the fatal spell, and with a resolute hand rescued the kingdom from its mischievous power. He removed her from being queen, we are told, because "she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa cut down her idol and burnt it at the brook Kidron." Idolatry, then, and its attendant abominations were tolerated, if not patronized and practised, by Abijah; and this corrupt element in his life was enough to neutralize and render valueless the sounder religious convictions and sentiments which at times wrought in his actions. With the wild, half heathen blood of Absalom, half a Geshurite, running in his veins, and the pernicious example and influence of an ambitious and unprincipled queen mother, the

practiser and patroness of some foul and sensual form of paganism in his court, it is easy to see how, with a belief in the God of Israel and occasional bursts of devotion when circumstances called them forth, this prince is justly described as having "walked in all the sins of his father," who was led astray in like manner, "which he had done before him, so that his heart was not perfect," that is, whole, consistent, single, "with the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father." It was the old attempt to serve two masters, which no amount of failure will ever persuade men to forego. He would fain combine the service of Jehovah with his mother's ancestral heathenism, and side by side maintain the worship of God on Mount Zion, and the obscene filthy rites of a pagan idol on some neighboring eminence; and thus be like the remnant of the ten tribes in a later age, who "feared the Lord and served other gods." The result was a mongrel religion without cohesion or consistency. "Their heart was not whole with Him, neither continued they steadfast in his covenant." "Their heart is divided, now shall he be found faulty." His was not a perfect heart, but a heart weakened and dissipated by a double allegiance. The powers of his heart were not united to fear God's name, but scattered and confused in the vicious compromise of an attempt to get off with a half service. Such service has no spiritual value. It is not that "true and laudable service" which God demands, and in the great interest of the soul's final salvation it is rejected as worthless.

And yet, at least, in one great occasion of Abijah's life, the better side of his religion came out speciously and even illustriously; and we hear him under its influence uttering noble thoughts in noble words. It is the only event of moment in the brief story of his reign. An exigency arose which called into action the religious convictions of his mind, and they acted for the time with vigor and success. Abijah had inherited the war with Jeroboam along with his father's throne, as we have seen. It seems to have become, indeed, on the part of Abijah's kingdom, a war of self-defence. Jeroboam, not content with dominion over the ten tribes, aimed to reduce the remaining two under his sceptre, to exterminate the family of David, and rear on the ruins of the true Mosaic economy the worship of the calves as the genuine symbols of the God of Israel. It was a struggle for existence, a strife to determine whether God's chosen people should be given up to apostatize from him, and an idolatrous and insolent schism be allowed to swallow up and appropriate to itself the Church of God; and it was Abijah's lot, with his crude and imperfect religious ideas, to be the Church's champion in the crisis, and lead the sacramental host of God's elect, in its battle with sin, Satan, and death. And it is recorded to his honor, that he rose to the demands of the occasion, and entering into the spirit of his position for the time without reserve, became not only the valiant leader, but the victorious deliverer of his people. Abijah set the battle in array with an army of val-

iant men of war, even four hundred thousand chosen men; Jeroboam also set the battle in array against him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, being mighty men of valor. The numbers are so enormous, that it has been supposed that some error has crept into the text at some time in the process of transcription. There were at any rate huge masses of men, and in their dread arbitrament the fate of the Church stood trembling. It made Abijah religious for the occasion. The better convictions of his soul gained the mastery, and swayed over him a temporary control. To inspirit his troops for the fight, he addressed their adversaries with words of noble eloquence. We have not room for his whole speech; we must content ourselves with a few extracts: "And Abijah stood up upon Mount Zemaraim, and said, Hear me thou Jeroboam, and all Israel; ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt (that is an indestructible, perpetual grant). "And now ye think to withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hands of the sons of David; and ye be a great multitude, and there are with you golden calves which Jeroboam made you for gods. And behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper." With the fearful odds of double numbers against him, in the strength of faith, for the moment shaking off his clogging incum-

branches, he courageously attacked the enemy, and achieved a signal triumph. "And when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind: and they cried unto the Lord, and the priests sounded with the trumpets. Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah." "And Abijah and his people slew them with a great slaughter: so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men." Thus the children of Israel were brought under at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers. "Neither did Jeroboam recover strength again in the days of Abijah: and the Lord struck him, and he died." Yet this brilliant achievement is but an episode or interlude in his life, the exception and not the general stamp of his conduct. And so, though it stands recorded of him that "he waxed mighty," and had many wives and numerous children, the summary of his life and reign, in the infallible words of the Holy Ghost, is only this, "that he walked in the sins of his father," and "his heart was not perfect," not upright, not consistent and harmonious with the Lord his God.

It follows in the way of warning from the case of Abijah, that religious belief and zeal, operating irregularly and upon occasions, and going out then into correspondent words and acts, may not be religion, and that they may not secure God's favor,

nor the salvation of the soul. True religion is a principle that seasons the whole life, and puts away all forms of wickedness, and works equably and habitually in all the varying conditions and occasions of our earthly being. It will not be the companion of an idolatry, or divide the possession of a man with the world and the devil, and only be allowed to assert its supremacy, and speak out in full free tones in special emergencies. Such seems to have been Abijah's religion, and herein it proves its spuriousness, and bids us to take warning. There is much religion of this sort now. At times it is very specious. It speaks now and then loudly and positively, and acts energetically, and by its demonstrations of fervor quite puts to shame quieter piety. But at ordinary times it is languid and lukewarm, puts on very dubious appearances, gives few signs of interest and activity, and is so mixed up with different descriptions of worldliness and habits of unsanctified indulgence, if not flagrant sin, that it affords small evidence of life and reality. And yet it is to be feared that on such grounds not a few rest their pretensions to a religious character, and whatever hope they have of attaining eternal life. They are religious at times, and then perhaps very religious, in some great exigencies, when called to act some important part or fill some important position, or under the contagion of sympathy, when contact with others kindles the smouldering spark of religious feeling into brightness. But at other times they are indevout and

careless, they countenance the idolatries of the world by bestowing upon them no marks of disapproval, and are themselves idolaters in their deep and undisguised immersion in temporal interest. If a host comes to do battle, they will awake and put on armor; but in time of quiet they are in the enemy's camp, quite at home, there trafficking and making merry. And yet, because at times they feel religiously, and can, and in all sincerity on one occasion make a religious speech, as Abijah did, they think themselves religious, and the wide spaces of deadness and vanity which intervene are overlooked and not counted in the estimate of their spiritual condition. Yet the religious fits are the exception, and the chief part of their lives is occupied by the far broader tract of serving "divers lusts and pleasures." And all the high religious feeling, and speech, and action which in spots is embroidered on the dull ground of their idolatry will never save them from being classed with those "who have their portion in this life," who "walk after the course of this world," and "whose hearts are not right in the sight of the Lord." Abijah was sincere and for the time out-spoken and ardent in his profession of zeal for God; but his religion was a religion of occasions, and like the early dew it went away. Occasional religion is worthless.

And again, we are admonished, in the case of Abijah, that prominent place and distinguished service in the Church of God are not saving religion. These he had very strikingly, and yet he walked in his

father's wicked way, and his heart was not perfect, not sound and whole toward the God of Israel. He was the chief person in the Church by virtue of his kingly dignity; and in the hour of her jeopardy he did exploits, and accomplished her deliverance marvelously. Yet, *in* it, he was not *of* it, but paid homage to idols, and his heart was not right in the sight of God. We are not let into Abijah's thoughts, but we can fancy that the memory of his great act dwelt much in his mind during the residue of his life, and went far to persuade him that it would be well with him at the last. Such delusions, it is to be feared, are not uncommon. The accident of birth, as men say, had made him king of Israel. The honors of David's line were concentrated in his person. He was the highest in rank, and the mightiest in power of any man in the nation, the nation that was the Church of God. He had a pride in the national religion, though he suffered it to be sadly debased and alloyed in himself and in his people. To defend it when assaulted was the instinct of his birth. The honor of a king and the patriotism of an Israelite required it at his hands, and he met the call bravely and cheerfully. Not David before Goliath, or Judas Maccabeus against the host of Epiphanes, were heartier or more resolute. And yet, this religion for which he was fighting, and uttering bold and eloquent words had no vital hold upon his soul. Beware, my brethren, that in this regard you do not mistake the shadow for the substance. The religion of position or circumstances,

whatever demonstrations in word or act it may call forth from us, may be utterly hollow, and have little relation to the things that accompany salvation beyond an outward alliance, wealth, or office, or some special conjunction of circumstances which bring us into prominent place in the things of God, while yet our hearts remain unchanged and unsanctified, and many motives beside a living faith may make us bear ourselves well in our station. Abijah on Mount Zemaraim, fighting for God nobly and successfully, and yet setting up his idols in his heart, is a solemn and profitable object of contemplation for us. A large giver may not be saved, a ready talker may not be saved, an earnest worker may not be saved, ministers may not be saved, nor wise and able champions of the faith, nor liberal and active laymen. There is no buying heaven in this way. We must put away our idols and give our hearts truly to God, and render to him a whole, a true-hearted, an undivided service. There must be no Queen Maachah, whose idols we countenance and help her to serve. The religion of place is worth nothing.

And finally see what honor God puts upon service even in such poor specimens of it as Abijah's. Religion is so precious in his eyes that any earnestness and zeal and endeavor in its behalf, though it be superficial and is not serving, shall have its reward. God helped Abijah when he took up for God, and made him victorious, and covered him with the glory of a victor; and that was the wages

of his work. So when the wicked Ahab humbled himself, though the humiliation reached not to any true change of character, God said, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself? I will not bring the evil in his days." Nothing done for Him that has in it a particle of sincerity shall go unrequited. All service, though it be not spiritual enough to save the soul, has generous remuneration. And how encouraging is this! If shadows and imitations, that are not merely mechanical, but have a little life in them, though of an inferior sort, receive a recompense of success and honor, what shall be the reward of true service? Oh, what a munificent Lord is this that we are invited to serve! Oh, if his goodness so overflows, how sure we ought to be that the recompense of a real service, such service as a living faith in Jesus prompts and produces, will be abundant above all we can ask or think!—an hundred-fold in this world, and in the world to come life everlasting! Such a master asks for our service to-day. There is no investment in the universe so gainful as this, no other service so able to pay us large and overflowing interest. If any one will give a cup of cold water only with a true and loving heart, he shall not lose his reward.

VII.

ASA.

And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father.—I. KINGS XV: II.

ASA is the first of the kings of the line of Solomon of whom the Scriptures speak in terms of unequivocal praise. He was like David; no greater compliment could be paid to his memory. It is noticeable how, through all this history, David is the standard of good, as Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, is the standard of evil. David was true to the worship of the true God; and men who came after him are commended according as they are like him in this respect, although they are like him also in having faults and errors. If a man's heart is right in the sight of God, and the general tenor of his life conformed to its dictates, his misdoings are exceptions, and though they mar, do not efface his goodness. But if he have virtues, and do some worthy deeds, and his heart is not right, he is still an *evil* man. The Scriptures fearlessly put down the sins of good men, and the worthy acts of bad men, and these sum up the estimate of the man with firmness and authority. Herein is inspiration. Here is the finger of God. "The Lord knoweth them that are his," and who

they are that he will own as his "in the day when he shall make up his jewels," and he draws with accuracy and decision that line of demarcation between the righteous and the wicked, which we are not competent to draw. In man it is presumption; in God simply omniscience. In this history God antedates the Judgment. The facts are stated, and the verdict is given with an unfaltering confidence; what they did that was good, and what they did that was evil are put down with an even hand, with a perfect impartiality and candor. The delineation is colorless and passionless, clear as crystal, tinged neither by love nor hate, and then what God thinks of the man at last is put down, and there is no appeal, no room for questioning or debate. This history is divine history, God's Word, and it is "written for our learning."

An item of this divine and instructive history we have in its brief sketch of Asa, the first king of the Davidic line of whom, as I have said before, it speaks in terms of decided commendation. And yet before it is done with him, it tells of a fault that he committed, and that a great one, and one that indicates a deplorable weakness of faith. On a trying occasion his faith in God proved insufficient. He resorted to worldly policy. He hired the help of a heathen neighbor, the powerful king of Syria even with the treasures of the house of the Lord, diverted from their sacred purpose to this worldly use, to defend himself against the attacks of the successor of Jeroboam, in the kingdom of the ten tribes.

This was political wisdom, but it was spiritual folly. Yet for the time it prospered. By the aid of this alliance he was successful, and triumphed in the war. It was a costly triumph, however, and, as all worldly policy in the Church does, entailed mischiefs that far overbalanced the gain. He set open a door to the heathen that could never be shut. He excited a cupidity in them that was satisfied with nothing but conquest. He provided an instrument which, when the nation's iniquity was full, God used to destroy it. In this respect his conduct contrasts unfavorably with that of his less religious father Abijah in like circumstances, who stood grandly up as the champion of his kingdom in danger, and single-handed achieved a signal victory. Yet of Abijah it is said that "he walked in all the sins of his father," and his heart was not perfect, not sound and upright with the Lord his God; while of Asa it is recorded that "he did that which was *right* in the sight of the Lord." The Lord drew the line, and it was an infallible line; men cannot draw such lines. Courage and manhood and patriotism are one thing, piety is another; man cannot always distinguish them, God can. He knows the difference between blemished goodness and specious irreligion. The book that makes these discriminations is the Bible, God's book, and not man's. Its utterances concerning men are foretokenings of the Day of Judgment.

To look now a little more particularly into the history of this king, and hold up its prominent points more distinctly to view: The heathen or

idolatrous party in the kingdom had flourished under the patronage of Queen Maachah, the widow of Rehoboam, the heathen daughter of the king of Geshur, during the reign of her son Abijah. That prince, though on the one great occasion of his brief reign he had acted and spoken as it became the ruler of God's people, had not depth and vigor of religious conviction enough to withstand her evil influence, but countenanced if he did not participate in it. Asa, his son, with a purer and more earnest religious faith, "broke the fatal spell." "Maachah" the mother, more accurately as the history shows, the grandmother of Asa the king, he removed from being queen, because she "made an idol in a grove." The obscene wooden image which it contained was committed to the flames in the valley of the Kidron. The polygamy of the court, which had lasted through both the preceding reigns, ceased, and the worship of the foreign divinities was forbidden. The achievement, to give it greater force and solemnity, was equalized by a vow or treaty, as if by a violent effort to bind the people to their better thoughts. This "solemn league and covenant" seems to have been the pattern of similar engagements in later days, not always as pure in principle as that whose sanction they claim. "They gathered themselves together in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa." "And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul." "And they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice,

and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the Lord gave them rest round about."

"Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God: for he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: and commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment."

This remarkable reformation was followed by an equally remarkable prosperity. "The land had rest, and he had no war in those years, because the Lord had given him rest." Yet this period of repose was wisely employed in strengthening the defences of his kingdom, by the erection of fortresses, and the equipment and discipline of an army. The tranquillity of the country had been previously broken by the attack of a Cushite tribe. His preparation proved effectual. Yet then not on man, or man's resources did he rely, but piously resorted to God for help. "And Asa cried to the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power; help us, O Lord, our God, for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee." And the Lord smote the enemy and he fled. It was on this occasion that the solemn covenant mentioned before was consummated, under the earnest exhortation and

advice of the prophet Azariah, the son of Oded :
“Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin,
The Lord is with you, while ye be with him ; and if
ye seek him, he will be found of you ; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you. Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. But when they in their trouble did turn unto the Lord God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them. Be ye strong therefore and let not your hands be weak ; for your work shall be rewarded.”
The revival of religious faith and feeling which expressed itself in that covenant not only pervaded the kingdom, but spread into the territory of the ten tribes. In the great assembly which the king called together for that purpose, there were “strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon,” as well as his own subjects ;” for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.”

Thus far all is fair and beautiful ; we have before us the picture of a wise, religious, and energetic prince. But it is *human*. It must have its dark shading. It is the picture of a man, and there is no man that liveth, and “sinneth not.” He was a man of faith, and faith had shown itself in him illustriously, yet his faith was weak ; alas, how seldom is it strong ! Even the Apostles are told that theirs was not as a “grain of mustard seed,” genuine but poor—such is religion wont to be in our fallen nature. Conspicuous, as we have seen, for his earnestness

in supporting the worship of God, and rooting out idolatry, with its attendant immoralities, and for the vigor and wisdom with which he provided for the welfare of his kingdom, the time came at last when he was found wanting, and the tone of his faith proved not equal to the emergency. The old war between the severed portions of Jacob's race still continued. In the northern kingdom, Baasha, having exterminated the posterity of Jeroboam, sat upon his throne. Insolently he built Ramah, on the very dividing lines between the kingdoms, menacing Jerusalem, to the intent "that he might let none go out or come in to Asa, king of Judah." And to strengthen himself in his bold pretensions he had formed a league with the king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus. Asa, by a stroke of policy, bought off the Syrian king, exhausting for the purpose the treasury of the kingdom, and even the gathered wealth of the temple. The measure was successful; Baasha retreated, and the materials which he had gathered at Ramah Asa employed in erecting fortresses to strengthen his frontier. This was prudence; but it was trust in man and not in God, and it met with a severe reproof. "Hanani the seer came to Asa, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. If thy faith had been stronger, thy victory had been greater; "yet because thou didst rely on the Lord"—because thou hadst some faith—"he delivered them into thine

hand." So it always is: "According to thy faith be it unto thee." "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly; therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars." And indeed, as it proved, he had sowed the seeds of trouble for generations of his posterity. Nor did Asa behave himself meekly under the divine reproof. "Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison-house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time." Alas for human nature! "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." At last in his old age, when he had reigned thirty-nine years, he was "diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great; yet in his disease he sought not the Lord, but to the physicians." Alas again! But now his life drew near to that end which awaits all lives. After three years more of suffering he "slept with his fathers," in the one and fortieth year of his reign,—in spite of his defects and blemishes, a good man, and one of the best Israelitish sovereigns. And deeply did his subjects love, honor, and lament him. "They buried him in his own sepulchre, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed, which was filled with sweet odors and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecary's art, and they made a very great burning for him."

Now, in applying this case to our own edification,

we find that it administers to us an admonition touching our faith, as it respects God, and touching our temper, as it respects man.

Touching our faith, it says to us, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding." Faith in man is a delicate principle when directed to the great object on which it ought, in view of what he is in himself, and of what he is to man, to rest with a calm and imperturbable firmness. By nature "without God in the world," he lives, if left to himself, not having "God in all his thoughts." If education brings the great idea into his mind, and divine grace fixes it there, and gives it form, and life, and reality, and power, it must be cared for assiduously, or it will fade, and in the end disappear. An exotic, it is never so domesticated in the soul as to become hardy enough to bear neglect, and be left to take care of itself. Asa was a man of *faith*. He believed in Israel's God, and not in the filthy idols of Maachah, or of the surrounding peoples. God was a reality to him, the God with whom he had to do, whom he recognized, remembered, revered, worshipped, served, and trusted. He was a religious man, and of all true religion *faith* is the central principle. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." And his faith on one occasion of his life had wrought illustriously. In the Cushite invasion it had obtained for him remarkable success. Perhaps the fact that it had operated so vigorously and efficaciously then had

put him off his guard. "Happy is the man that feareth always." He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." He had proved himself a man of faith once, and so he pronounced his faith strong enough for any emergency that could possibly arise. It was a presumptuous and hasty thought, and it was punished. So, when Baasha came against him, with Benhadad for an ally, as it were, before he knew it, he swerved from his reliance on God. The heart, "deceitful above all things," led him astray into a dependence upon "an arm of flesh." And instead of standing up bravely in God's strength, to fight in God's cause, he bought off Benhadad by bribery, and triumphed by a league with idolatry, and then God's faithful servant, that reprov'd his fault, he visited with contumely and harshness. And so he marred the beauty of his life, toward its close, with oppression and injustice. Alas, this weakness of faith, and its failures, what a besetting evil of the religious life it is, and how sadly it detracts from the symmetry and value of much genuine religion! Let us diligently watch against it in our own hearts. Let us be careful to set God always before us, to realize him to ourselves as a true, personal, present, governing God. Let us cherish and feed the principle of faith in our souls by meditation, by prayer, and the faithful use of all means fitted to make the things of faith real, evident, and influential. Let us recognize God's overruling providence as ordering all things in heaven and earth, and rejoice in the conviction that "not a sparrow falleth

to the ground without our Father !” Let us act in the belief that “our help standeth in the name of the Lord,” and not in ourselves or in men, and that with that help the weak are strong. Let us rely implicitly on his mercy in Christ Jesus, for all strength to do and to bear here, and for all hope of good hereafter ; that so, “not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we may have our conversation in the world,” and that, “after this painful life is ended,” our faith may be found in the day of the Lord, laudable, glorious, and honorable, to the increase of glory and endless felicity.

And now for a closing word touching the temper in which good men should receive the reproofs which their errors oftentimes merit and invite. Asa met the faithful rebuke of the seer, whom God had sent to show him his error, not with the meekness and thankfulness which it deserved, but with resentment and rage. He had swerved from faith in God, and now he swerved from justice to men ; so sin is prolific, and one fault begets another ; yet reproof is an office of true friendship, and, rightly administered and accepted, is salutary. “Am I then become your enemy because I tell you the truth ?” says St. Paul to the Galatian Christians. Never did he more show himself their friend. “As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.” Alas, that the Christian man’s ear is so often not an obedient ear ! “A reproof entereth more into a wise man, than a hundred stripes into a fool.” Alas, that so few are

wise ! On the other hand, "he that refuseth reproof erreth, and he that hateth reproof is brutish." Plainly then, reproof is a powerful instrument of instruction and improvement. And it is a duty of our Christian vocation, to be performed with a due regard to circumstances and relations, but not to be utterly refused. The correlative duty is that of receiving it with calmness, with candor, with docility. We see in the case before us how a great king, a wise king, and a good king *failed* in this respect. He was wrong ; he had distrusted God ; he had resorted to unworthy means to compass a worthy end. But he could not bear to be told that he was wrong, even by an accredited minister of God. Perhaps, in the joyful flush of success his conscience did not at once respond to the accusation. "He was angry with the seer, and put him in prison ; and he oppressed some of the people the same time ;" those we may think who took the seer's part. Yet the seer did but do his duty. The Law under which he lived had said, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him." And he was God's special messenger. Reproof is a difficult thing to administer well, more difficult to receive well. We are ready enough to say, this was very bad in Asa ; how strange a thing in so good a man ! But, let us see to it, that in judging another we do not condemn ourselves. To know our faults is wisdom. To tell us of them is kindness. Let us not be angry with the truth because it is unpalatable, or deem our truest friends our

enemies ; but welcome all helps to self-knowledge, and gladly improve them to repentance and amendment of life.

And finally, let us take home the comfortable conviction that a good life, though it have stains—and what life has not ?—will at its close, when men come to sum it up, receive at their hands a fair meed of approval, reverence, and honor, as Asa's did ; and beyond, from the just and yet merciful Judge, a reward “beyond all that we can ask or think.”

VIII.

JEHOSHAPHAT.

And Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel.—I. KINGS XXII: 41.

THE lives of kings and others in eminent station recorded in the Bible are put there not merely as so much history, but in order that, by the contemplation of them as they are portrayed by the Divine Spirit, men through all time may be made wiser and better, fitter to live, fitter to die. Jehoshaphat, the fourth of the kings of Judah, is one of the kings of whom the Word of God speaks well, whose course in the main it holds up for imitation. It says of him: "And he walked in the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was *right* in the eyes of the Lord." "And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; but sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel." Yet the historian adds "Howbeit." Alas! what good life is without its "howbeit"—its exception, its flaw, its blot? And the "howbeit" in the case of Jehoshaphat was very grave and important and prolific. For after all the commendation that God bestows upon him, after all his claims to be re-

garded as a good man and a good king, after all we see in him that is brilliant and beautiful and beneficent, we are compelled to look upon him as the source of that long train of evils which ended in the ruin of his country, and to say that, though eminently pious and patriotic, he destroyed the religion of his kingdom, and as the remote but effectual cause, brought the state to disgrace and destruction; that *his* hand sowed the seed, of which, centuries after, the Babylonish Captivity was the full-blown flower. He made alliance with Ahab, king of Israel, and cemented that alliance by the marriage of his son Jehoram with Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and the abominable Jezebel. And so Jehoshaphat was, after all, rather a fortunate and successful than a great ruler.

Jehoshaphat, then, was one of those kings of Judah, of whom the Word of God speaks in terms of commendation. And yet from his reign and his policy dates the decline of that kingdom, the beginning of that downward course, which, with a few temporary checks under the rule of pious kings, went steadily on till it ended in ruin and extinction. Policy was, indeed, his great and fatal error; the substitution of policy for obedience, the assumption of independent action instead of that careful reliance on the directions of Him, who, under the theocratic constitution of that government, was the real sovereign, and whose deputy and viceroy the human monarch only was. Jehoshaphat, albeit a God-fearing man, forgot what he was, and undertook the management of his kingdom, as though he had no

superior, whose will he was bound to ascertain, whose directions he was bound to follow. It is a fault into which men, and good men, are apt to fall. So Joshua, in the conquest of Canaan, suffered himself to be beguiled by the crafty Gibeonites, when "the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." The precept is to all men, specially to rulers, above all to a ruler of such peculiar relations to him as a king of Judah: "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not to thine own understanding." Jehoshaphat, unfortunately for himself, leaned to his own understanding, and reaped the evil fruits in an entailment of mischief on his family and his kingdom that went on thickening, till at last by the waters of Babylon they "sat down and wept," unable to "sing the Lord's song in a strange land."

Jehoshaphat inaugurated a new course of policy toward the adjoining kingdom of Issachar, of the ten tribes, that had grown up into strength and prosperity by his side during the reigns of his father and grandfather. Hitherto the two kingdoms had stood toward one another in an attitude of open hostility. "There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days." Then followed the reign of Abijah; and still there was war between Rehoboam, in the person of his son and successor, and Jeroboam, "all his days." Asa followed; and "there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days." Jehoshaphat thought there had been war long enough. He resolved that there should be war no longer. He determined on a pacific policy. He

thought it was wise. In the eyes of men it was wise. I am not about to say that it was not wise in substance; but it certainly was not wise in form. "Jehoshaphat joined affinity with Ahab," and cemented it by the marriage of his son and Ahab's daughter. There might not have been an obligation to perpetuate a national feud, but it was not well to staunch it by the admission of a domestic taint which in the end would prove to the country, whose royal line it infected, a worse evil than war—far worse. Peace is good, but it may be purchased too dearly. From the times before the flood, when the sons of God took wives of the daughters of men, matrimonial alliances with the wicked had been a prolific source of the spread and increase of sin. God had told his people not to make marriages with the idolaters around them, and plainly forewarned them of the evils that would follow. But Ahab was an idolater, and, not satisfied with the worship of Jeroboam's calves, had brought in the viler abominations of the Phœnician superstition. His court, we have reason to think, was splendid and voluptuous; and in the imported luxury and magnificence of Sidonian civilization, Samaria outdid Jerusalem. It dazzled Jehoshaphat. He did not desire to continue at war with his prosperous neighbor. It was better that the divided parts of Jacob's race should dwell by one another in peace. To reduce the revolted tribes again under the sceptre of the house of David was impossible. It was contrary to the declared will of God. "Thus saith the Lord,

Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel." There should be peace between Judah and Ephraim, Jehoshaphat and Ahab. And the peace should be sealed by a family alliance. Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram should marry Ahab's daughter Athaliah. But Ahab's daughter was also Jezebel's daughter. And Jezebel was the daughter of the king of Sidon, and taught her husband and her son the worship of Baal; and thus Samaria, under her corrupting influence, had become a second Sidon, as idolatrous, as sensual, and as foul. And all this debasement was now carried to Jerusalem, the city of God, where it was first tolerated out of courtesy to the new ally, and then domesticated, loved, and adopted. And so though, during Jehoshaphat's time, the king's real goodness and true religious faith kept the evil in check, his death soon removed the barrier; and then heathenism, and all the disgraceful practices that follow in its train, came in like a flood. Jehoram openly worshipped the deities of his wife and of his father-in-law. Israel turned its back on the holy rites that were observed upon Mount Moriah. The temple of Solomon was to a large extent forsaken. Men went in crowds to the groves and high places, where an obscene yet elegant religion sat enshrined. The royal stock carried in its veins the poison of Phœnician corruption. The tide set strongly in the direction of unbelief and apostasy. The voices of the prophets—the stern rebukes of Elijah, and the more courtly remonstrances of Elisha, the sturdy plainness of Amos, and

the sharp warnings of Hosea—made little headway against it. A good priest like Zacharias, the son of Barachias, “whom they slew between the temple and the altar,” might win the crown of martyrdom by his fearless fidelity. A righteous king like Hezekiah or Josiah might bring about a pause and a partial reform. But the heart of the people was perverted, and fully set in them to do evil. And not till the city that was full of people had sat solitary seventy years; not till the Lord had “caused the solemn feasts and Sabbaths to be *forgotten* in Zion,” and had “despised, in the indignation of his anger, the king and the priest,” was the bad leaven purged out of the people, and such a firmness of faith established among them as would manfully defy the might of Antiochus, nerve the hands of the Maccabean brothers to fight, and so strengthen even women that they were tortured, not “accepting deliverance,” that they “might attain a better resurrection.”

Yet Jehoshaphat was a good king, one of the *best* of the Jewish sovereigns. He was, too, a prosperous and successful monarch. His country *flourished* under his sway. He sought to do his subjects good, and he did them good. God blessed and honored him in his ways. He died in peace and in favor with God. He rests among the righteous in Paradise, and awaits the resurrection of the just. But he leaned to his own understanding in a matter of great moment. He put policy for principle, conciliation for frank dissent, worldly advantage for

manly firmness, and sowed the seeds of evil, that lived and thrived and bore fruit centuries after his decease.

The Word of God tells the story with its customary impartiality and fairness. "The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; but sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. Therefore the Lord stablished the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honor in abundance." And in the third year of his reign he sent his princes to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them he sent Levites, and priests, "and they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people. And the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat." "And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly; and he built in Judah castles and cities of store. And he had much business in the cities of Judah; and the men of war, mighty men of valor, were in Jerusalem." But now for the flaw in his character and life. "He joined affinity with Ahab," and soon complaisance toward his new ally drew him into a war with Syria, in which he was not called to intermeddle by duty or regard to the public weal. The result was defeat, and a narrow escape from death. And the seer

Jehu, the son of Hanani, said to him on his return to his house: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God." He persevered after this in his godly course, and carefully sought to perform among his subjects the office of a religious and upright monarch. The neighboring tribes attacked him; for now by his sinful alliance and engagement the shield of the divine protection was withdrawn. But he sought the Lord, and was favored with a great deliverance. "So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest round about." But alas! Jehoram, his son, had the daughter of Ahab to wife. And from the entanglement of this bad connection he could not get clear. "And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel," the son and successor of Ahab, "who did very wickedly: and he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish." "Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Maresah, prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish." But now his life of mingled good and evil, success and disaster, glory and disgrace, drew to its close. And "Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried

with his fathers in the city of David, and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead."

Now then, here we have *two* distinct phases of the life of one man very strongly contrasted, yet much mingled up, contradictory of one another in a very marked and striking degree, so that as the history passes alternately to the one and the other, we might almost doubt either the identity of the man or the veracity of the narrative, did we not see similar inconsistencies in men, and feel them in ourselves. For what agreement is there between Jehoshaphat seeking God, putting down idolatry, disseminating the Word of God and preachers of righteousness throughout his dominions, appointing righteous men to govern and judge his people, praying to God for help, and praising him for his gracious intervention, rich, powerful, prosperous, successful, honored; and the same Jehoshaphat courting the friendship of one of the worst of men, bringing into his court and into the embrace of his son the vile daughter of the vilest of women, joining him in his war of greedy ambition, listening to the lying divinations of his prophets of idols, associating with his wicked son in projects of commercial gain, worsted, fleeing from unsuccessful battle, reproved by the solemn voice of God's prophets, and, though at last dying in peace, handing on to his posterity and his realm a legacy of evil which should mark his reign in his country's annals, with all that was good and seemly and praiseworthy in it, as the source of that decay which ended in its destruction?

See here the vital necessity of *singleness* and *unity* in the religious life. The want of it may not destroy its genuineness and reality, but it will greatly mar its symmetry, its comfort, and its usefulness. "Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty." "Ephraim is a cake not turned," says Hosea. "*Unite* my heart to fear thy name," prays the Psalmist; bring all the power of my soul into harmonious and concentrated action in thy service. Let no one feeling or faculty stray away after alien and contrary interests. Alas, what want of unity there is in most Christian lives, what an alloy of the world cleaves to them and disfigures them, how little there is of that gathering up of all the forces of the life into one single purpose, which spoke in St. Paul's "This one thing I do"! Alas that men will, despite the Saviour's warning, essay the impossible task of serving God and mammon, and make their religious life like the religion of the Samaritans, who "feared the Lord and served other gods." My brethren, our renunciation of evil, in any and in all of its forms, can never be too absolute, too thorough, and too complete, nor our watch against its intrusions too constant, too vigilant, and too earnest. In our lives, if we leave it there, or let it in, it can only be a cause of wickedness, deformity, and failure.

And consider, again, how great the temptation to compromises is. In what seemly forms the temptation presents itself; with what specious pleas it asks for admission. Peace was a good thing, war was a sad calamity. Surely it was well to put an

end to it. And friendly neighbors must reciprocate friendly acts and form ties of friendship. Jehoshaphat at peace with Ahab must admit Ahab's daughter into his family. And having family bonds with him, he must espouse his quarrel, and help him in battle, and join his ungodly son in sending ships to sea. So the evil crept in under a very seemly disguise. So it is wont to do. It is too wise to show its ugly face naked. It comes in a mask. Scrutinize things carefully ; see if they will bear examination ; see if they are indeed what they profess to be. Beware of careless alliances and hasty engagements. There may be that in some very well-looking associations that will poison our whole lives, and do harm to generations unborn.

For remember, finally, that a wrong step once taken cannot easily be retraced, and an injurious engagement once entered into will hold us fast beyond possibility of extrication. If we watch the life of Jehoshaphat, we shall see this strikingly exemplified. That bond which fastened him to Ahab was a tether beyond which he could never go ; we see him all his life struggling to be a good man, to serve God, to promote the best interests of his kingdom, to strengthen God's Church, promote virtue, religion, truth. And he did it. But it was in shackles, and at a fearful disadvantage. How could he drive out idolatry, who must connive at an idolatrous daughter-in-law in his court, and go to battle with an idolatrous ally, attended by a retinue of four hundred lying prophets, and see the only true

prophet there mocked and insulted by Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah? He could not do it. Yet from this alliance, which he looked upon as a master-stroke of policy, he could not disengage himself, he could not unmarry his son, he could not brave Ahab's wrath. "He that committeth sin is the servant of sin." It is so universally. Beware of a false step. Pray God to keep you from it. Once taken there may be no escape, and "no place for repentance," though you seek it "carefully with tears."

IX.

JEHORAM.

Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab : for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife : and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord. Howbeit the Lord would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a light to him and to his sons for ever.—II. CHRONICLES XXI : 5-7.

THE inspired histories of the Jews are full of instructions, and if we read them with care and reflection they impart to us lessons of life of the highest interest and value. All history is profitable, and every devout and believing mind will see God in it, the true actor in its events, the true solution of its phenomena. But here we have history in which God is graciously pleased to reveal his action and proclaim his meaning ; to reduce political and secular interests to their true inferiority, and exalt the moral, the spiritual, and the eternal, to their proper pre-eminence. A history so illuminated is a series of pictures illustrative of truths and principles of the greatest practical value, full of warnings against specific errors, follies, and faults, rich in commendations of wisdom, virtue, and religion in their varied applications to the different circumstances, occur-

rences, and exigencies of life. They are barren only to the thoughtless and the superficial; while even their less marked and striking portions become mines of spiritual riches to the studious and the diligent. Perhaps, for instance, such a passage as that which I have just read, to multitudes of persons seems of little importance, the mere filling up of the narrative, an unmeaning link in the chain of events. Jehoram is to them but a name; there is no definite instruction in the man, no particular lesson is enforced by the very brief and general story of his life. But I am persuaded that Jehoram deserves to be studied, and that if we will bend our attention to him, he will come forth from the dimness and indistinctness that invest him, and stand out upon the tendons a man, with a life and character that may be studied with interest and profit.

Jehoram was the son of Jehoshaphat, who was, as we have lately seen, a good man, but a weak sovereign; and in the father's errors are to be sought the causes of the son's faults and misfortunes. It was the error of Jehoshaphat that, though a truly religious man, he was too much influenced by the principles of worldly wisdom and political craft, and did not sufficiently remember the peculiarity of his position as the head of a theocratic constitution, the ruler of a people of whom God was, in a special sense and by a peculiar arrangement, the King and Protector; whose true strength lay in God's favor, whose real weakness arose from God's displeasure. He was ambitious and susceptible of flattery, desirous

to shine among the neighboring monarchs, and for this purpose he engaged in foreign wars and entered into alliance with Ahab, the king of apostate Israel, thinking thereby to augment both his own personal importance and the honor of his kingdom; but only getting for himself the mortification of a disastrous defeat, and entailing misery and misfortune on his subjects, descendants, and successors. Nevertheless he was one of whom it is recorded that "he turned not aside from doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord," and that he "sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments." And often is it thus the case that the blemishes and defects of good men almost neutralize their virtues and services, and leave it a problem in the balance of their life whether the cause of God has been more benefited or injured by their influence.

The capital blunder of Jehoshaphat's reign, then, was his alliance with Ahab, the idolatrous king of Israel, one of the basest and most atrocious of all the line of evil sovereigns that ruled over the revolted tribes. He had desisted from active war with his neighbor, not unadvisedly; but a league with him was uncalled for and dangerous. It involved him in the shame and loss of the battle of Ramoth-gilead, in which Ahab lost his life, and drew down upon him the bold censure of the prophet. Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord. Never-

theless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God." But not till Jehoshaphat was at rest in his grave did the worst effects of his errors appear, as is often the case. Our misdeeds hand in their mischiefs to the generations following, and the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generations. The political alliance with Ahab was cemented by the marriage of his son and heir Jehoram, the subject of this discourse, to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, a connection that brought an evil alloy into the line of David, and plunged the family of Jehoram in misfortune, and brought it to the verge of extinction, and in a few years reduced Judah almost to the level of the sister kingdom, in irreligion and vice. The mother of Athaliah was Jezebel, a Phœnician princess, who brought into Israel with her the vile, filthy, lascivious religion of her own country, and engrafted it upon the worship of the golden calves which Jeroboam had invented. The deterioration of the nation after this was rapid, it hastened to its just doom. Athaliah was such as the daughter of an Ahab and a Jezebel might be expected to be, a bold, shameless, unscrupulous woman, who imbrued her hands in the blood of her own offspring, usurped the throne, maintained idolatry in its vilest forms, and at last perished like her wretched mother by violence. By these two evil women, the mother and the daughter, were the seeds of corruption and decay plentifully scattered in both

branches of the sacred stock, and the destruction of both was thus fearfully accelerated. There is nothing viler or more pernicious than a bad woman. A bad woman is indeed one of the worst things on earth. Jezebel brought the Tyrian religion into Israel, Athaliah carried it into Judah, and soon the whole Israelitish people in both its branches was swallowed up in the worship of Baal, the impersonation of cruel, unscrupulous, and relentless *power*, and of Ashtaroth, or Astarte, the deification of obscene and sensual pleasure; and so the sacred idea of divinity in both kingdoms became such as to be fitly honored by blood and lust. The awful scenes that followed were the appropriate results.

Jehoram, then, was the husband of Athaliah, and the son-in-law of Jezebel. They stamped their mark upon his character and life, and the evil passed on in his posterity till Judah was destroyed. For the bad taint never departed from the royal line, though it was temporarily arrested in Josiah and Hezekiah. In the second generation from Jehoram the line would have been exterminated but for the precarious preservation of his grandson Joash by his daughter Jehoshabeath, who had married the high priest Jehoiada. He plunged into the idolatry of his wife's family with eagerness, and compelled his subjects to conform to the vile practices which it brought in its train. His brethren of his father's house, which were better than he, true to their father's principles, probably opposers of his infatuated and ruinous cause, he put to death. And soon

the sad spectacle was presented of a king and people, in that land where alone the true God had revealed himself, forsaking his service, and giving themselves up to the gravest excesses and abominations that disgrace the heathen. Then it was that "there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: and thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day."

And now came the terrible retribution, the awful fulfilment of the prophet's threat. "Moreover the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians; and they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. And after all this the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease. And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his

bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings." So lived and died Jehoram, drawn in his youth by a good but unwise father's ambition into a fatal alliance with wickedness, the husband of the wicked daughter of the wicked Jezebel, corrupted, spoiled, ruined by association with irreligion and idolatry, visited with God's heavy displeasure, till in his royal palace, turned by suffering into a hospital and a tomb, impoverished and bereft, loathsome to himself, a nuisance to others, at the early age of forty he departed without being desired. Not loved in life, not lamented in death, denied a royal tomb, and only allowed a grave in Jerusalem out of respect for his exalted station. What a picture! What a moral! Nor did the mischief end here. See how it reaches on to following generations. "The people of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his stead." "He reigned one year in Jerusalem." "He walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly," that same evil daughter of Jezebel that had destroyed the father. He went to visit the king of Israel, his cousin, and was killed in the conspiracy of Jehu, which occurred at the time; so the alliance was the cause

of his death, as it had before been of his wickedness. Athaliah now usurped the throne, and signalized her accession by a general slaughter of the seed royal. One youthful grandson, Joash, the youngest son of Ahaziah, escaped the slaughter, and was kept hidden in the temple by his aunt, the high priest's wife. After a few years he was produced, and in a rising of the people in his favor Athaliah was put to death in an attempt to escape. Joash, after a hopeful beginning under the guidance of the good high priest, on the death of his counsellor fell into the evil ways of his family, and perished by assassination. Amaziah, who succeeded, was murdered, and Uzziah, the next in the line, died a leper; so the fault and the punishment went down to the third and fourth generation.

And now, if I have succeeded in introducing you into a rather unfrequented page of the sacred history, so as to have made its events real to you, and taught you their inner meaning, and have, in particular, set before you one of its personages, and made Jehoram a man to you, and caused him to stand forth with something of distinctiveness to your mind, as a being that had a character and a life, and a history that has a meaning and a moral, and showed you his fault and his punishment, reaching back in their antecedents to the folly of his father that involved him in the mischief of an evil marriage, and forward to its consequences in accumulated miseries to himself and his posterity, I shall have accomplished my end, to teach you to read

those old histories with due attention and a proper regard to their spiritual signification, and so set before you the specific lesson which the particular instance before us contains.

See, then, in Jehoram the mischief of close association with the wicked. All his misconduct and his suffering, and the evils his course bequeathed to successive generations of his descendants, which so afflicted his family, his kingdom, and the church of God, grew out of the root of his marriage with Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. It neutralized the effect of a pious education, and all the good influences which must have surrounded the early days of the son of the good Jehoshaphat. Sad is it to see that the father, for reasons of state and temporal advantage, betrayed the son into the ruinous connection—a warning to parents not to sacrifice their children's spiritual good to worldly interest, and especially in the fundamental particular of their associations in life. It made him an idolater, a worldling, and a profligate. It diffused its corrupting venom into every department and stage of his life. It made him a bad ruler, a bad father, a bad man. It filled his life with sin and his death with despair, and sent him unprepared to the bar of God, and then it transmitted its evil influence to successive generations of his posterity. Oh! how true is it that "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed"—true as an aphorism, on philosophical grounds, but truer as an instance in the pregnant

illustrations of such an example as that before us. No doubt Jehoshaphat thought he was making a grand connection for his son when he was allying him to the daughter of Israel and the granddaughter of Tyre ; and unquestionably, upon worldly principles and calculations, he was strengthening himself and his kingdom. But he was in fact weakening both. He might better have married his son to the humblest of Judah's daughters that was virtuous and religious. Such things are being done continually in courts, and not in courts alone, in the marriages of policy or profit which ambitious fathers and scheming mothers promote, receiving, as in the case before us, the reward that is meet in misery to themselves and their posterity. Let parents guard well the associations, the intimacies, the alliances of their children. Let the young carefully avoid those who are wrong in opinion or evil in life, and in seeking associates and companions in any relations of life, but especially in those which are closest never forget the paramount claims of truth, of goodness, of right principles, of worthy conduct. Their character, their honor, their usefulness in life, their hope in death, largely depend upon it. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers? for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? for ye are the temple of the living God ; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them ; and I will be their God, and

they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Finally, consider the awful and destructive nature of sin. See it in this case of Jehoram. What a horrible wreck it made of his life. It is terrible to contemplate a life so barren of good to himself and to everybody, a death so loathsome, a memory so dishonored, an influence so productive of harm. Yet all this was but the genuine fruit of sin, of forsaking God, disregarding duty, living for the world, serving idols, indulging evil desires. To some such result sin is always tending, though in many instances God's merciful providence prevents the full development and open disclosure of its pernicious effects. You may never be a Jehoram, the cause of corruption and ruin to your family, dying by inches of a foul and offensive disease. But see what a viper you take into your bosom when you admit sin into your soul. What a leprosy you let into your life, when you suffer sin to gain admittance into your actions. Little in its beginning, it will turn your whole spiritual nature into corruption in the end, and cover your whole history with blight and disgrace. Fear nothing so much. Guard against nothing so much. And ever pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

X.

AHAZIAH.

So Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram, king of Judah reigned. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.—II. CHRONICLES, XXII: 1, 3.

THE reign of this prince was short and tragical. It lasted but a single year, and it terminated in his death by violence. It began in blood and it ended in blood. He was the youngest of his father's children, for all the rest had been slain by a band of men that came with the Arabians to the camp. He was exempted from the massacre by the hand of that Providence which, in fulfilment of the "faithful oath unto David" which God had sworn, would not permit the light of his royal line to be wholly put out. And so when his miserable father, smitten with a loathsome disease, had departed "without being desired," in the midst of the intestine disorder and foreign war, at the age of twenty-two, "he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem." The poor young king had no good training, much bad training. If he was bad—and bad he was, for the Bible tells us that "he did evil in the sight of the Lord"—it is not strange, when we consider what his parentage was, and what his bringing up had been. He was born, nurtured, and

bred up to early manhood in a foul, wicked, and idolatrous court. "His mother was his counsellor to do wickedly," says the historian, and little more need be said. The fountain of his life was poisoned; no wonder that its streams were filthy and bitter. The mischief of the good King Jehoshaphat's weak and mistaken policy, in forming a matrimonial alliance with the royal family of Israel, had by this time become mournfully apparent. The seed had grown up, and was blossoming and bearing fruit after its kind. Ahaziah was the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, and Athaliah, who, you will bear in mind, was herself the daughter of Ahab, king of Israel, and Jezebel; and Jezebel's name is to all time a proverb of iniquity and vileness. The daughter was worthy of the mother. Nay, in daring, high-handed, unscrupulous wickedness, she equalled, if it had been possible, would have exceeded her. Nor was there anything in Jehoram to counteract or mitigate his wife's bad influence. Married to Athaliah, by his pious father's folly, in his youth, he quickly imbibed her sentiments, and yielded himself unresistingly to her pernicious guidance; and so he imported into Judah that obscene, sensual, disgusting form of idolatry which the Sidonian Jezebel had carried with her into Israel. He made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah thereto. So an ideal composed of lust and cruelty became the nation's god, and a beastly voluptuousness the nation's worship. At

his accession he put his six brethren to death, to secure himself against disaffection or revolt; and his reign of eight years was chiefly consumed in prosecuting the war against Syria, into which his father Jehoshaphat's fatal alliance with Ahab had drawn the kingdom of Judah. In his absence on this ill-starred enterprise, Edom revolted from him; and the Philistines and Arabs broke into his capital, ravaged his palace, and destroyed his family, "so that there was never a son left him save the youngest of his sons." And after all this the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease, till at last he departed "without being desired," not loved in life, not lamented in death, and his people, burying him with maimed honors, "made no burning for him like the burnings of his fathers." All this we have already seen in a former discussion. To the wretched inheritance of his father's idolatry and wickedness, along with his ruinous friendship with the abominable house of Ahab, his youngest and only surviving son, Ahaziah, succeeded, to be involved shortly in the impending fate of that family.

But Athaliah survived to be the ruin of her son, as she had been already the bane of her husband. She was a woman of strong impulses and a determined will, and the young sovereign gave himself up to her directions. Under her counsels he began that career of irreligion and licentiousness which speedily ended in his destruction. The succinct and forcible statement of one of the two of the historians of his reign is, "He also walked in the ways of

the house of Ahab : for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the Lord like the house of Ahab : for they were his counsellors after the death of his father to his destruction ;" and of the *other*, " And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the Lord, as did the house of Ahab : for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab." At the time of his accession, the royal line of Omri, in the adjacent kingdom, of which, through Ahab, his mother was a daughter, was fast approaching that terrible retribution for the atrocities of which it had been guilty, which God so signally inflicted upon it by the hand of Jehu ; and as Ahaziah made common cause with it he partook of its fate. " The companion of fools shall be destroyed." He was their companion and he met their doom. " The destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed. And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them."

The war with Syria, which Ahab of Israel began, and in which Jehoshaphat of Judah so unwisely meddled, in consequence of the marriage of his son with Ahab's daughter, was not yet appeased. It came down with the kingdom as an evil legacy to Ahaziah. His uncle Jehoram, of the same name with his father, was sitting on the throne of Israel. The alliance of the two monarchies into which the Hebrew race was split, cemented so strongly by intermar-

riage and the predominating influence of the queen-mother, he had neither disposition nor power to break. "He went with Joram, the son of Ahab, to the war against Hazael, king of Syria, in Ramoth-gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram. And King Joram went back to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael, king of Syria. And Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, went down to see Joram, the son of Ahab, in Jezreel, because he was sick." At this juncture the rebellion of Jehu occurred in the camp, after Joram had retired from it. Jehu, proclaimed king by the army in the camp, with the swift driving which has made his name memorable, made haste to Jezreel to slay his disabled master and take possession of his throne. At the report of his approach and hostile purpose, the two kings went out to meet him. Jehu shot Joram through the heart, and his body was cast into the field of Naboth, so wickedly seized by his father, under the perfidious advice of Jezebel, to fulfil God's Word, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." "And when Ahaziah, the king of Judah, saw this, he fled by the way of the garden house, and Jehu followed after him, and said, Smite him also in the chariot. And they did so at the going up to Gur, which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo, and died there. And his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his sepulchre with his fathers in the city of David.

Another historian says, "The destruction of Ahaziah was from God by his coming to Joram." "It came to pass that when Jehu was executing judgment upon the house of Ahab . . . he sought Ahaziah; and they caught him, for he was hid in Samaria"—that is, not in the city, but in the territory which had come to be known as Samaria in the writer's time—"and brought him to Jehu"—who, we must infer, was at this time where the earlier historian states that he was when Ahaziah was killed at Megiddo. "And when they had slain him, they buried him," carrying him to Jerusalem for that purpose, as it appears. "Because," said they, "he is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the Lord with all his heart." The two accounts thus supplement one another, and together complete the story of his death. Such were the character, career, and end of Ahaziah, the fifth king of Judah, as the Word of God sets them before us.

God has "caused all holy Scripture to be written for our learning," and "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." This story is inserted in the Word of God to be of use to us. And that we may not miss that use, we must now go back to the central fact of this unhappy king's short life. And a very awful and a very pregnant fact it is.

He had a *bad mother*, and his bad mother was the evil genius of his life and reign. She was evil. She taught him evil. She set him an example of evil. Her strong qualities gave evil in her hands a

tremendous and destructive force. She made him evil. He *was* evil. And he came to an evil end. He did not "live out half his days." Misfortune slew the ungodly. And though a veil conceals what is beyond, we know that "the wicked is driven into darkness," that outer darkness where is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." The record is, "His mother was his counsellor to do wickedly"—Athaliah, the evil daughter of an evil mother, proud, energetic, daring, fierce, the devotee of a religion that fed the worst passions of our nature under a semblance of duty and devotion. She formed him in childhood. She advised and directed him as a man.

A mother: there is no one else in whom the life of a child is so much, as it were, contained, that so forms the atmosphere in which it moves and has its being. And this influence is put forth at the period when the subject of it is the most impressible, the most ready to take its mould and color from the objects around it. And of all these objects there is none so potent as the mother, none that works at so great an advantage, and with such powerful effect. There is none with which the child is so constantly and familiarly associated, and to which he is so strongly drawn by dependence, and the natural instincts of confidence and affection. He that has the making of the mothers of the nation makes the nation. Maternal influence is continually flowing forth; and, entering deeply by avenues which the hand of time has opened for it, it embeds itself, as it were, in the child's nature, and sends itself into every

department of its life, communicating a line of thoughts, ideas, feelings, sentiments, opinions, conceptions, as they come forth into shape from the chaos in which its life begins. And as the process of development goes on, impression grows more and more into guidance, and the young being learns to look with a more conscious intention for instruction and direction to her on whom his eyes have gazed with a blank, indefinite reliance, ever since they opened on an external world. A child when it begins to exercise a conscious will needs a guide, a guide to think, and a guide to act, and the mother is at hand to fulfil that office. None can do it so well or so effectively. She will discharge it if she has no deliberate intention. She discharges it of necessity. And never had a being a substance easier to work upon. The child is unsuspecting, uncritical, trustful. He puts faith in the mother. To him the mother is the standard of right and truth. What the mother thinks, or says, or does, he is not disposed to question or doubt about. The presumption in his mind is always that she is what she ought to be, and that her beliefs, views, maxims, are worthy of confidence and adoption. Her very obliquities are not oblique to *him*; and so her obliquities are adopted by him, and he does not begin to suspect them to be obliquities till his mind is so warped that he is incapable of judging of the question fairly. And now he is fashioned into her image; and if she is evil, she has made him "two-fold more the child of hell" than herself. If she is a woman of

strong character, and has found her way far into her child, this guidance is indefinitely prolonged, and then may reach far beyond his entrance in the years of manhood and the independence that it claims. And thus, as in the case before us, the instructor of Ahaziah in the nursery may become the counsellor of Ahaziah on the throne. The influence of the father seldom rivals hers. He can seldom be as much with the child. His assiduity, however anxious and loving, comes not in so tender a form. The occasional fondling he can afford, the teaching, advice, reproof that at spare moments he bestows, but poorly match that ever-present, ceaseless, untiring pressure, which from morn till eve, and from Sunday through the days of the week till Sunday returns again, rests gently, but for that reason all the more efficaciously on the wax of early life, to make the impress upon it deep, clear, and indelible.

And now if the woman be an Athaliah, a woman of false beliefs, unsound opinions, corrupt habits, unbri-dled passions and appetites, false, selfish, sensual, a slave of pride, or fashion, or vanity, devoted to no higher aims than those of this world, and the gratification and pleasure it offers; and especially if, as may be, the moral rottenness be covered with some film of personal attraction in appearance, manner, speech, be coupled with intelligence and culture, why then "Beelzebub, the prince of devils," has on earth no more puissant minister of harm. And if a child grow up under such tutelage it shall be a miracle if he does not come to be a bad man, of no religion, or of

one that turns the truth of God into a lie, and counts some form of sin an acceptable service to him. Supremely devoted to worldly good, and unscrupulous in regard to the methods of attaining it, selfishly bent on his own advantage at the expense of others, or sunk in some form of vice that brutalizes the man and renders him an offence and injury to others, the blot and bane of the family and of general society. Doubtless such a mother will seek to form her child into her own image; and he will go after her in his early simplicity, "as a fool to the correction of the stocks," till, tied and bound by the chain of evil habit, he becomes enamoured of his gilded fetters, and walks unblushingly, "in the ways of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes," till the light that is in him is darkness, and oh, how great is that darkness! Then the moral and spiritual ruin is complete. A mother who does not know herself to be grounded and settled in the fear of God and in the principles of Christ's religion, undertakes a fearful task, and incurs the awful risk of reproducing her own character with aggravations, so that she will not perish alone, but drag after her another whose being, drawn from her own and bound to it by the closest tie, corrupted by her influence, is plunged with her own in the same hopeless abyss of woe. A mother who teaches her child falsehood, unsound principles of action, indulgences in practices and pleasures of dubious morality, and by word and example is leading him to make light of religion, and disregard its duties and re-

straints, is doing more than any other can to bring him to ruin. God forbid that of any son of any mother among us it shall be said that his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.

But, in order to make a mother mischievous to her offspring, it is not necessary that she should be grossly bad, or endeavor with any fixed purpose to communicate to them her own bad views and ways of life. Doubtless there is many a mother who feels to a certain degree that she is not exactly what she ought to be, and indolently wishes that her children may be better than herself. But she takes no pains to bring about that result. She does not set about the fundamental work of amending herself, and the stream will not rise higher than its source. She is simply thoughtless and frivolous. She does not feel her responsibility. She does not understand the value of her charge. She lives by no definite rule. She lives with no elevated aim. She lets time flow on in an inane enjoyment of ease, or in doing her work as a matter of course. She believes in treating religion decently, with a certain vague respect, and she should be shocked at a suspicion of immorality. She would not on any account teach her child anything that would make him bad ; but then she does not teach him much that would make him good, at least with any steadiness, earnestness, and intensity, only occasionally and in a languid way. She does not pray for him : if she prays for herself, it is only as a pious custom which was taught her in her childhood, and which she does not like to aban-

don. She does not teach her child much directly ; but she *does* teach him very much by her example and her casual unconscious expressions of feeling in his presence. And that teaching is very bad. She teaches him to live loosely and carelessly, to forget God, to live unto himself, to slide through the world with no high purpose, with no deep sense of obligation, to count his baptism nothing, to “do despite to the Spirit of grace” which it brought him, to “trample under foot the Son of God,” whose blood is made over to him, to float on the tide of circumstances, and with a general intention to be respectable, and if he can, rich and happy, yet get through life as his fathers did before him. And with this wretched preparation he goes forth from her into a world that is full of evil, to encounter its manifold temptations, to see its seductive forms of sinful pleasure, to behold the glitter of its glory, and learn all that is meant by “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.” Against such influences he is not well fortified, and he becomes their victim. He grows vicious, or involved in some species of positive wickedness, and is recognized as such. He is not necessarily put under the ban of society, for he must be very bad whom society will not endure. And so he lives, and so he dies, or it may be that the grace of God finds him, and turns him, by a late repentance, into the way of life. But if he is not greatly altered in one of these ways, for the worse or the better, his life runs on as it began, devoid of high principles and

holy aims; with no creed very vigorously held, or with a creed that accommodates itself to his practice; a decent worlding, more or less esteemed according as his natural qualities are calculated to elicit the praise of men or their censure; and then he dies and all his thoughts perish. And a giddy, worldly, irreligious mother is the fountain whence the evil stream has flowed.

May the mothers within my hearing lay these things to heart; and God give them wisdom to be wise betimes for themselves and for their children.

XI.

ATHALIAH.

And Athaliah reigned over the land.—II. CHRONICLES XXII: 12.

THERE is but a single female reign in the annals of Judah, and that was a usurpation. Yet as it lasted six years, and during the time of its continuance exercised all the functions of government, it deserves a distinct consideration among the reigns of the Jewish sovereigns. There was, indeed, a legitimate monarch living; but as he lived in concealment, and his existence was unknown to the people; and as moreover he was a young child, incompetent to discharge the duties of a king, his royalty during these six years is but a legal fiction, an ideal abstraction recognized only by the law of hereditary succession,—such a royalty as was that of Charles II. in the days of the Commonwealth and in Cromwell's time, or Louis XVII. in the time of the French Republic, or that of the Stuarts among their adherents after the accession of the House of Brunswick, or of the ex-kings of Naples and of Hanover and of the old French royal line, in this period of greatly diminished reverence for hereditary claims and dignities among those who believe in them. Jehoash may have reigned all that time theoretically, and according to the law of suc-

cession; but Athaliah ruled potentially six years. And she was a woman who had the elements of power in her: bold, fierce, daring, courageous, unscrupulous, she gained the throne by violence, and she held it with a vigorous and resolute hand. The daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, she was what such a parentage might be expected to make her, at once in force and in wickedness. The Sidonian blood in her veins, brought with it Sidonian strength and Sidonian corruption. In her, the fierce determined energy which ran through the Phœnician princes and princesses of that generation was fully developed. She became the great pattern of the worship of Baal, in the southern kingdom, as her mother had been in the northern. She had brought it in, in the days of her husband Jehoram; she had cherished it through the short reign of her son Ahaziah; and now, when that ill-fated prince had perished with his uncle on the plain of Esdraelon, and she had attained to an undisputed supremacy in her own person, she grew so audacious in her support of its cruel and licentious rites, that it quite overshadowed and threw contempt upon the worship of God in the Temple. Rising to power by the cruel murder of her own posterity, she kept it with a strong hand, awing into acquiescence by her stern severity all who might otherwise have dared to question her title or oppose her bold idolatry, the Semiramis of Judah.

When peace between the two severed branches of the Israelitish race was wisely made by Jehoshaphat,

the fourth king in descent from Rehoboam, in whom the division began, it was unwisely, as we have seen on former occasions, cemented by a marriage, the marriage of Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son and successor, with this woman Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, then sitting on the throne of the ten tribes, by Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon. The two marriages brought in a deluge of sin and misery, that, with some short ebbings, continued to swell till it submerged and destroyed both countries. They were both great women, the mother and the daughter, by the world's standard—great, if mind and will, and energy, if earnestness and unswerving purpose be greatness—not great by God's rule; by that rule, indeed, the meanest and the smallest. With these women came in the Baal worship, that same dark, foul, sensual, abominable superstition which the sword of Joshua exterminated in Canaan, polished but not purified by the time that had intervened. With marriages come political ties and alliance in war. The kingdoms were drawn close together, and Jerusalem was tainted by Samaria, as Samaria had been tainted by Sidon. And when at length Jehu was raised up as God's scourge to destroy the wicked house of Ahab, Ahaziah, the then reigning king of Judah, Athaliah's son by Jehoram, perished with them, as also others of the royal family. Jezebel was thrown from a window of the palace, and devoured by dogs, so that "they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands." But

calamities so awful did not shake the soul of Athaliah. They served but to bring its forces into more vigorous action. When the tidings reached Jerusalem of the overthrow of her father's house, of the dreadful end of her mother, and the fall of her ancestral religion in Samaria, instead of daunting her resolute spirit, it moved her to a still grander effort. She did not quail. She wasted no time in mourning. She saw her opportunity, and she sprang to it with a fierce joy. Now was the time to establish her own authority, and the ascendancy of her religion. She would be queen of Judah; and then it should be seen whether Baal or Jehovah should be Judah's God. What was human life, what was natural affection to such a consummation? No doubt this human tigress was animated to her work not only by personal ambition but by religious zeal, such zeal as inflamed Saul when he breathed out "threatenings and slaughter" against the disciples of Christ. Such zeal as has in later days looked with a placid and pious satisfaction on the rack and stake and the scourge as the sharp but effectual and therefore the beneficent medicines of heresy. And so, when Athaliah "saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal" of the house of Judah; "and Athaliah reigned over the land." Hitherto, two religions had been struggling for the mastery in the kingdom. During the reigns of her husband and her son the worship of Baal had been let in and patronized, but had never formally become the state religion. Now, a queen half

heathen in blood, and wholly heathen in feeling, could make it supreme. And if some belief in Jehovah as a real local divinity, and some cautious regard to the national traditions, might induce her to suffer the Temple worship to go on, and the Mosaic forms to be observed, she could put them at the proper point of depression ; and Baal should be Judah's God. Solomon had done much to corrupt the national religion. Filthy Astarte and savage Molech had found a place in the sacred city. Now Baal comes in forms at once splendid and loathsomely sensual. "If there was a holy city, there was also an unholy city within the walls of Zion, and the two were striving for the mastery." Athaliah meant that the unholy city should triumph. She cut off all the seed royal, some of them, at least, her own grandchildren. So long as the race of David remained, David's religion would be apt to linger. A few helpless children were to be got rid of, and the result was secured. They were put to death without a pang of remorse ; and then Athaliah reigned over the land, and her religion reigned with her. The Temple stood ; and the Temple service went on for those who cared for it. But the court was pagan, Jerusalem was a Phœnician capital, Judea was a province of Baal's empire.

For six years she possessed the throne in peace. But "the triumphing of the wicked is short." When she cut off the seed royal, one seedling escaped. God had said, "Once have I sworn in my holiness that I will not fail David ;" and it was not

in the compass of human power to break the line that was to connect David with that "son of David in whom his throne, in glories more than earthly, shall be eternal," "whose kingdom shall have no end." So too shall that promise of our Lord, "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," stand fast, and no might or malice of men or devils be allowed to break that chain of many links by which the Church's Bishops are derived in lawful and orderly succession from those to whom the first words were spoken. That seedling was silently growing into strength under the fostering care of the queen's own step-daughter, his aunt, Jehosheba, the high-priest's wife. Hidden from the eyes of men in the chambers and cloisters of the Temple, he was waiting till the time should come for his "showing unto Israel." Without premonition the avenging tempest came, while Athaliah was basking in the full sunshine of success and security. The high-priest had formed his plans wisely and secretly. The Temple guard, instructed in the part they had to perform, and willing instruments in the overthrow of a hateful usurpation, were so disposed as to effectually prevent all intrusions or interruption. Then the royal boy was brought forth, and after being crowned and anointed and presented with that divine Law which was to form his rule of governing, was placed on the throne, elevated on a column or pillar which the king was wont to occupy on solemn occasions. The noise of the music and the shouting which celebrated her grandson's coronation

aroused the attention of the queen in the adjacent palace. She hastened to the spot; for she was not a woman to flee danger, but to face it; but it was only to see the young king upon his throne, surrounded by armed men, amid the joyous gratulations of those who welcomed in him the recovery of the lost line of their ancient sovereigns. By the command of the high-priest she was dragged forth from the precincts of the Temple and put to death. So, miserably perished this wretched woman, as her wretched mother had perished before her.

I have three things to say about her, all of which I would fain hope, may be made instructive.

She was a *woman* among the Sovereigns of Judah—this is her distinction. Yet, surely, nothing can be more unfeminine than her character and her history. She unsexed herself; and with such unsexing, she lost all that was lovely and truly honorable in her sex, and became monstrous and hideous, while the qualities of the sex into whose province she intruded became in her the instruments only of injury and mischief. Detestable in a man, they were horrible in a woman. She lost the true glory of a woman, and did not gain the glory of a man. The true glory of a woman lies in being truly womanly. The glory of everything lies in being that which its Creator made it to be, and in not aspiring to be any thing else. If it does, it becomes either unseemly or pernicious, in its glory. And surely the glory of a woman is enough, and she may well be content with it. She will, if she is wise; and she has no occasion to

envy man's glory. Hers is different, but it is not inferior. What honorable names of women, who were women and content to be women, gem the pages of history! And if we look around our own circle of observation, who so honored in it as women, good, true, womanly women? Who so free from the soil and blemish which are the drawback in human reputation? A Christian woman, moving serenely in her sphere, a wife, a mother, in all fidelity, lovingness, purity, a pattern of patience and good works in her domestic relations, an angel of mercy and a teacher of all good things in her wider walk,—thank God! such are not hard to find,—is there anything more beautiful, anything to which the hearts of men more gladly do homage? “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.” “She stretcheth out her hand to the poor, yea, she reacheth forth her hand to the needy. She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the Law of Kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed: her husband also, and he praiseth her.” “Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.” Will she gain anything by aspiring to be an Athaliah, a politician, a statesman, a

ruler? Nay, she will suffer unutterable loss. She will be a monster; and, if the devil takes advantage of her weakness, as he will be apt to do, she will be a fiend. For see what a woman who like Athaliah will unsex herself and shoot madly from her sphere may become—if not worse than a bad man, at least far more odious and frightful. The glory of women is not found in an Athaliah, or a Semiramis, or a Catharine, but in a Hannah, and a Mary.

This woman was a *zealot*, she was a zealot for her religion, she was very religious after her fashion; and she spared no cost and pains to promote the interest of that form of religion which she held as true. And she believed in it implicitly. She had been educated in it. It was ancestral to her. It was mingled up with the memories of her childhood and her home. The misfortune with her was, not that she was not religious, but that her religion was wrong. Sincerity did not make her religion good, as some shallow reasoners think it can. She worshipped a god in whose service lust and bloodshed were piety; and the worshipper grows to be like his god. So Saul was sincere and zealous when he was persecuting God's saints to death; and the Athenians very religious, when to their innumerable altars, they added one "to the unknown God," for fear that one deity might have been overlooked in their pantheon. It is not enough that we are religious; we must look to the quality of our religion. It is not enough that we pray much, and make many prayers, and are honest in belief and ardent in feel-

ing. If our conception of God, and if the religious life be not right, it will make us bad and not good, worse and not better. The most horrible things in history have been perpetrated in the name of religion, and in all sincerity of purpose. I bear them record, says St. Paul, "that they have a zeal for God; but not according to knowledge," enlightened, genuine, conformed to the will of God; suited to the needs of your over-spiritual nature. See that God be enthroned in your minds in His true ideal, the holy, good, the wise, that doeth all things, and doeth them well; and let your thoughts be of Him, your worship, your service, be such as befits him, such as he requires, a service of love, of holiness, of pure, cheerful, grateful obedience. That will not make you a torment and a monster in your religious earnestness, but will spread over your life a raiment of whatsoever is honest, true, pure, lovely, and of good report.

Once more, this woman was a *usurper*. She had rank, and station, and power, and wealth, and splendor; but she had no right to any of them. They were all ill-gotten, all feloniously obtained, all reached by fraud and violence. And what good did they do her? Six years she had them, so far as we know, in undisputed possession. But were there no fears for their stability, no misgivings about the end? What uneasiness dwelt in her bosom as she walked in state through the halls of Solomon's palace! She was Queen of Judah; but by no right, human or divine. She had riches, but she had stolen them from

her own murdered children. She had power, but if there were none left to demand its restoration that she knew of, it was because her cruelty had consigned them to an untimely grave. Did not their power sometimes walk with her, in her magnificence? And then the possession how brief, the end how sudden and how awful! an unforeseen, a violent, and an ignominious death—in one hour a queen, in the next a dishonored carcase, cast out as carrion. And the soul is gone to its own place, to be with all those who have sold themselves to work iniquity. Oh! “what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” Good that is not sought uprightly, that is not fairly obtained, is but an illusion and a semblance. If it be true in its measure of every man that has this world’s goods, that he “walketh in a vain shadow and disquieteth himself in vain,” specially is it of him that “getteth riches and not by right.” Such riches do indeed “perish by evil travail.” And though no violent or disgraceful end await their possessor, an uneasy conscience and a remorseful death cleave to him, and they are but preludes to those awful self-upbraidings, beyond which are the worm that never dies. Be content with what God gives you. Be not uneasy because your lot is low or your portion small. “They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare,” and they that will be great and powerful or illustrious are in scarcely less danger. There is no telling what awful crime such desires may yet lead to. What other men have done we are capable of doing. Atha-

liah tells us, that even the tender, shrinking, sympathetic nature of woman, for power and splendor, may commit deeds of awful atrocity, and barbarous cruelty, if once passion and desire are allowed to gain the mastery. Pursue right ends by right means; and if ever a wandering wish tempts to a different course, crush it as a cockatrice's egg that will by and by break out into a viper. And the love of the world in any of its forms is full of such temptation. Do not let the world be your chief good. In that alone is safety. See what bounds in the ordering of Providence circumscribe your own rights, and keep rigidly within them. "Remove not your neighbor's landmark." See his bounds, too, and scrupulously respect them. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."

XII.

JOASH.

And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him.—II. KINGS XII: 2.

JEHOIADA, the priest, as he is here called, was the high-priest, the successor of Aaron as the head of the Levitical hierarchy; and his wife Jehosheba was the half-sister of Ahaziah, Joash's father, being the daughter of King Jehoram, by a wife whose name is unknown. But though Jehosheba was the child of Jehoram, she did not walk in his steps. It may be that her mother was a religious woman. And then, happily, wickedness is not always or necessarily hereditary, and the offspring of evil parents is under no fatal necessity of copying their evil example. And the prophet tells us "that if the son seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like, he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live." The Scriptures contain a sufficient number of examples of this kind to counteract the disheartening idea of any necessity of wickedness as growing out of the fatality of birth. A daughter of Jehoram even was "a woman that feared the Lord." Who then shall despair of God's favor on the ground of parentage? A good mother may neutralize the in-

fluence of an evil father. Perhaps, an early alliance with the high-priest had kept or restrained her from the contagion of Phœnician beliefs and morals; for marriage has almost as much to do with the character and course of men and women as birth. Through the dark period of Athaliah's power, by means of her pernicious influence over her husband, her usurpation of the throne after his death, the Mosaic worship, though not suppressed altogether, was forsaken and discountenanced by the court. Still, in the Temple the faithful high-priest kept his charge, and the sacred rites of the true religion were duly celebrated; and though "few came to the solemn feasts," there were yet men in Israel to "sigh and cry for the abominations that were done before them." Meanwhile, the Temple, uncared for, fell into disrepair, and the process of dilapidation seems to have been hastened by violence; for the historian tells us that "the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God," marred and defaced it by wanton or malicious injuries; and also, "that all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord did they bestow upon Baalim." Still, in the dismantled and forsaken edifice did the faithful high-priest continue to execute his sacred functions with unshaken faith in God and hope of better days. And there the providence of God threw into his hands a treasure far more precious than the "gold of the Temple" or any of its ceremonies or adornments, in the person of the royal boy Joash, the only surviving descendant of the royal

house of David in the line of Solomon. The young prince had been snatched from the destroying fury of his ruthless grandmother, the miscreant Athaliah, by his Aunt Jehosheba, the high-priest's wife; and was securely kept and nurtured in secret in the ample courts of the Temple till a fit time should come to throw off the hateful usurpation that oppressed the nation, and restore the rightful heir to his lineal inheritance. Thus within the very shadow of the palace was growing under God's care an unknown branch of the royal house, by whom, in God's good time, his "faithful oath unto David" was to be secured from failure, and the sceptre of Judah made sure till Shiloh should come. The light of David had burnt down to its socket, but there it still flickered. The stem of Jesse was cut down to the very roots; one tender shoot was all that remained; on him rested the whole hope of carrying on the lineage of David; for six years they waited. At the end of that time the people, weary of the atrocities and oppressions of Athaliah, were ripe for revolution, and Jehoiada felt that he could venture to rely upon their co-operation in breaking the odious yoke. Joash, a child of but seven years, was brought forth from his concealment, exhibited to the people as the representative of their ancient kings, and solemnly inaugurated as their sovereign. Athaliah was put to death, and the reign of the boy king began amidst the joyous acclamations and felicitations of the emancipated nation. For years his reign must have been but nominal, and the actual

administration of affairs remained in the hands of the wise and conscientious priest, by whom he had been preserved in his infancy, and under whose tutelage and oversight he grew up to manhood. Nor did the salutary influence of these principles and counsels terminate even then. As long as Jehoiada lived Joash did well, and his reign was eminently pure and prosperous. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days wherein Jehoiada, the priest, instructed him." His kingdom was free from foreign invasions and internal discord, and flourished in the arts of peace under an upright and paternal government. It pleased God in mercy to Israel to prolong this happy condition of things far into Joash's reign; for at least two-thirds of it were past when Jehoiada died. And it was during this halcyon rest of the nation, in which the blessed times of David and Solomon seemed to have come back to them, that the work was undertaken and executed which sheds the distinguishing glory over the reign of Joash among those of the kings of Judah, the repairing of the Temple, and its restoration to its original beauty and perfection. Under the growing ascendancy of heathenism in the reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah, and still more under the openly idolatrous usurpation of Athaliah, the Temple had suffered from neglect and still more from spoliation. Its treasures had been given away to invaders; it had been plundered by Egyptians and by Arabs; and it had probably been used as a quarry in Athaliah's time to

furnish materials for the Temple of Baal and her other costly constructions. It now retained but marred and faded remnants of its first glory, and dishonored the religion of a people whose proudest boast it was that they had the Lord for their God. To Joash the Temple must have been peculiarly dear, as the asylum and nursery of his childhood, and the abode of those who in its courts had shielded him from harm, and watched over his lonely orphanhood with a more than parental solicitude and tenderness. An early act of his reign, doubtless under the advice of the good high-priest, was to make provision for the removal of this national scandal, and put back the proud shrine of the nation, so far as he might, into that condition of grandeur and dignity in which his great ancestors left it. A pleasing act of gratitude, as well as of religion, it was in the young king to restore and beautify the courts and cloisters which had formed the shelter and play-ground of his hapless childhood. Yet the work went on languidly in the hands of the Levites, one cannot determine whether owing to the indifference or the inability of the priestly tribe, to whom it was at first appropriately committed, so that "in the three and twentieth year of King Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house." At last, however, in more efficient hands the work was happily consummated, and stood the glory of Joash's reign and of Jehoiada's administration. But now Jehoiada waxed old. He was, indeed, full of days at his death, for "an hundred

and thirty years old was he when he died, and they buried him in the city of David among the kings," a unique and unexampled honor, yet not unmeet for one who had made the king, and who, while he lived, was in real power more than the king himself, "because," adds the historian, "he had done good in Israel, both toward God and toward his house."

And alas! with Jehoiada's death came a dismal change in Joash. The good genius of his reign departed with the aged high-priest. Accustomed to lean upon his wise and conscientious counsellor, when the prop was removed, it appeared that he could no longer stand upright. He had no root in himself; his virtue was but parasitical, and when the tree died the mistletoe that clung to it withered away. Sadly does the last third of his reign compare with its earlier portion. A similar contrast there is in secular history in the Emperor Nero, before and after the death of his tutor, the philosopher Seneca. Alas! how much goodness there is that looks fair, and yet is but the child of circumstances, and not of principle. And so, as the result, the reign of Joash stands, in one aspect of it, marked with a singular honor, in another stained with a remarkable disgrace. The re-edifier of the Temple lived to be the murderer of the priest that ministered at its altar. The grateful ward of Jehoiada was the destroyer of his son; and now, by the lips of the Son of Man himself, the blood of "Zacharias the son of Barachias, who was slain between the Temple and the altar," stands coupled with the "blood of righteous

Abel," and, strange to tell, Jehoash, whose care had once restored that Temple and that altar, was his slayer, the murderer of his kinsman, of the son of his best benefactor, of the head of his religion and its priesthood; and the memory of a king of hopeful indications and beginnings stands branded with the mark of Cain, in whose way he went. Joash was not possessed of much natural force of character; and religion, albeit he had been for a time its patron and protector, had gained no deep lodgment in his soul. Deprived of his wonted support when the high-priest died, he looked about for another, and there was one at hand. The vices of idolatry had not died with Athaliah. Doubtless, there were many who looked back to the sensuality and license of her reign with regret, and were ready to persuade her too-yielding successor to emancipate himself from the vigorous restraints imposed by his venerated monitor. Joash was yet young. He died at the age of forty-seven: and it was in the twenty-third year of his reign that he set about the completion of the work on the Temple more vigorously. This must have been when he was thirty years old. Within a few years of this time the work was finished and Jehoiada died. A period of ten years or a little more remains for his downfall in character and condition. He was in the maturity of his powers, when the restraints that had before holden him back were removed, and he was left free to follow his own royal will. A fatal freedom it proved to be, involving shipwreck for time and shipwreck for eternity.

“Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah and made obeisance unto the king.” They were courtiers ready to flatter him, and by flattery to gain their own selfish ends, like the evil counsellors of his ancestor Rehoboam. “Then the king hearkened unto them; and they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers,” the house the king had restored with so much care and cost, “and hewed groves and idols.” Phœnician superstition and filthiness were once more in vogue. The prophets warned in vain. At last “the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada,” the priest who had succeeded to his father’s place and principles, and who is called the son of Barachias by our Lord in the New Testament, a name of equivalent meaning—“which stood above the people and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the Lord. Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The Lord look upon it and require it.” Athaliah was now indeed avenged; but the wretched monarch in avenging her, if that was any part of his motive, covered himself with eternal infamy, and left his name for a curse unto God’s chosen. And soon the awful imprecations of the dying martyr and the threat of

the martyr's God met their ample fulfilment. Invasion, defeat, disease, and a bloody death, came in quick succession. Hazael, king of Syria, came up against him, and, after stripping him of all his treasures as the purchase of a respite, soon returned, and a very great host was delivered into his hand. The disheartened and impoverished king was seized with great diseases; and, while languishing on his bed, in anguish of body and mind, in the fortress of Millo, "Jozachar the son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants, smote him and he died." "And they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings." The slayer of the son might not sleep with that father whose memory he had so ungratefully and atrociously dishonored. So did the fair morning, for the want of depth and steadfastness of principle, give place to an evening of darkness and storm; and the hopeful signs of early youth led into apostasy, crime, misery, disgrace, and ruin. The life of this king is monitory, full of solemn warning.

We see in him *what a religion of circumstances is*, and of how little value. It stands by props, and when the props are withdrawn it totters and falls. It has no deep roots well set in the earth that can support it, when it is left to depend upon its own resources; and no inward channels of supply that can carry into all parts of it the vital current, and keep it fresh and living. The religion of Joash was but the reflection of Jehoiada's. It shone in the lustre cast upon it by his brightness. But when

this sun went down the reflected brightness departed with it. Yet the goodness of Joash was both specious and useful. For years he stood the apparent bulwark of truth against error, of Jehovah's worship against idolatry; and, from his lofty position, "a city set on a hill that could not be hid," he was conspicuously the representative of the true God in the sight of men. And yet, all the time, "his heart was not right in the sight of God;" circumstances and not principles made him what he was; and with change of circumstances his life changed its phase, and the patron of truth became an idolater and a persecutor. All his religion was mechanical and external. It was on the outside of the man, and did not go down into his heart to possess its convictions, affections, and purposes. It arrayed him, but it did not inhabit him. And while, perhaps, he was by no means a conscious hypocrite, but was religious according to his conception of religion, he did but move through a routine of forms, under which lay hidden a cold, selfish, and unloving heart. The outward life obeyed the mould into which the high-priest cast it, but there was not consistency and firmness enough in its texture to keep the shape when the pressure of the mould was withdrawn.

And we see in him, also, how liable such *spurious virtue is, sooner or later, to give way, and expose its hollowness*. The guardian is removed, enticers and flatterers ply their seductive arts; the heart yields and shows its evil bent, and the life falls into sin, very often rushes into its excesses. The builder of the

Temple is the destroyer of the priest. Alas, for that religion that depends for its stability upon circumstances! For circumstances are changeful. This world "never continueth in one stay." A religious education and virtuous association put a fair varnish on the life that passes for goodness. The open world dissolves the varnish, and underneath is nothing but deformity. The stream runs quietly in the straight channel that is cut for it. The bank gives way, and off it gambols in curves, through thickets, down dark ravines and foaming rapids. And, not unlikely, the life, once emancipated from an unnatural restraint, avenges itself on the power that kept it in. Who so bold and bitter and cruel as a renegade? Zechariah, foster-brother, playmate, cousin, holy priest of God, painful remembrancer of better days, thou shalt die. A lapsed professor of godliness is apt to be a strenuous enemy of God. And seldom will a life that has clothed itself in seemingly semblance be allowed to run undetected to its close. Providence alters its outward relations, and then comes undisguised sensuality or vengeful hate, or, as is strangely but not uncommonly the case, the two.

It is a good thing to have religious friends and be trained among virtuous associations, and to have the watchful eye of a holy affection resting on us in our youth, and in our entrance upon the theatre of independent action. Such influence may shape our lives aright, and make them comely. But alone, they are not enough. The grace of God must come

into our souls with its quickening and renovating power, and make us new creatures if we are to be permanently godly. Let us not forget to seek it, and continually rely upon it. Let parents and guardians not forget to invoke its aid in their great task, that while they are fashioning the outward shape, the Spirit of God may be working truth in the inward parts, and that those deep-seated principles of faith in the Redeemer, love to God, and devotion to duty may be graven on the soul, which are the only effectual safeguards against temptations, the only trustworthy assurances of steadfastness, perseverance, and continuance in well-doing. If you would be really, and permanently good, you must put on the new man which is created in righteousness and true holiness.

XIII.

AMAZIAH.

Then Amaziah king of Judah took advice, and sent to Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us see one another in the face. And Joash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle. Thou sayest, Lo, thou hast smitten the Edomites; and thine heart lifteth thee up to boast: abide now at home; why shouldest thou meddle to thine hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee? But Amaziah would not hear; for it came of God, that he might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought after the gods of Edom. So Joash the king of Israel went up; and they saw one another in the face, both he and Amaziah king of Judah, at Beth-shemesh, which belongeth to Judah. And Judah was put to the worse before Israel, and they fled every man to his tent.—II. CHRONICLES XXV: 17-22.

THE Jewish kings whose lives are written in the Scriptures, we are all along to bear in mind, are pictures, and studied, they become lessons. Each one has an individuality and a moral of his own. Let us see this morning what can be made of Amaziah. He is a man in whom there is good and evil; and the good and evil that are in him are specific. The one may serve to us for instruction, and the other for warning. The inspired historian says of him that "he did that which was right in the sight

of the Lord," that is instruction, "but not with a perfect heart," that is warning—for it made his right doing of very little account, as we shall see. He does not appear to have been a very wise man, a man of very sound judgment or of very firm principles. He seems to have been a hardy man, of an *adventurous* and *uneasy* nature, ambitious of conquest and military renown, prone to "meddle to his hurt," when in fact "his strength was to sit still," and his real wisdom to cultivate the arts of peace and develop and improve the internal resources of his kingdom, to abide at home, as the historian phrases it. This craving to be a warrior and a conqueror, and the ill-judged acts into which it led him, are the great blemishes of his character and reign. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," says the historian of the Kings in the parallel narrative, "yet not like David his father: he did according to all things as Joash his father did." Joash his father—there probably is a great part of the secret of his errors and deficiencies. He had not the advantage of good descent or of good example and training. Joash's was but a very inconsistent and unstable goodness. "Joash," says the annalist, "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all the days wherein Jehoiada *the priest* instructed him"—did right under good guidance, but not when left to himself. There was no root in him, and so he endured but for a while. When the good priest was dead, he listened to other counsels, the advice of princes, and was led away into idolatry and the sins that follow

in its train, till at last Jehoiada's son, that "Zacharias the son of Barachias" of whom our Saviour speaks in his solemn invective against the Pharisees, though his near relative, and the son of that aunt to whom he owed his preservation and all the nurture of his early years, was stoned by the king's command in the court of the house of the Lord, and "slain between the temple and the altar." Amaziah was this king's son, and he imitated his example; and his goodness was of the same partial, dubious, questionable character, very little better than not being atrociously bad. This must always be borne in mind, as we shall be following its effects to the end of the history. It was the evil leaven that had come into the royal line of Judah in his great-grandmother Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and wife of Jehoram,—the bad alloy which the vile Phœnician princess wrought in continued to work. How long it lasted! How tenaciously it clung! What mischief it entailed! Jehoram, who married the daughter of Jezebel, Athaliah, died of a loathsome plague in his bowels. Ahaziah, the offspring of the marriage, was killed by Jehu. Athaliah herself usurped the kingdom, and perished in the rebellion that upset her usurped authority and set Joash, the lawful heir, upon the throne. Joash was murdered in his bed, by enemies. Amaziah, whose case is now before us, fled from Jerusalem on account of a conspiracy against him, as we shall see, and was assassinated at Lachish. His son Uzziah or Azariah was smitten with leprosy, when he was strong and his

heart was "lifted up to his destruction," for an act of presumption, and sacrilege, in daring to usurp the priestly office and burn incense. He was leprous unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a "several house," sequestered from his kingly functions. It is a sad but most instructive picture which the house of David in those days presents. Strikingly illustrative of the mischief of "evil communications," and of the contagious and adhesive quality of evil principles, when they gain admittance into a stock or a household.

We have to do this morning with Amaziah, the son of Joash, the great-grandson of Jehoram—whose wife was Athaliah—the great-great-grandson of Ahab and Jezebel, the fifth in descent from that imported fountain of sin and suffering in the royal house of Judah, the Sidonian Queen of Israel. The taint, we see, has not run out; it is still strong, and sadly verifies God's threat to "visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him." But we are to look at the particular phase which sin and folly assumed in this link of the evil chain.

The great failing of Amaziah seems to have been a weak but restless ambition. He was always aiming to do grand, brilliant things, beyond his power, and neglecting to do the simple ordinary things within his reach, in the faithful performance of which lay his plain duty, his true usefulness, and his real honor; and the measure of success which attended his efforts in this direction led him on to new undertak-

ings which involved him in defeat and disgrace. He signalized the beginning of his reign by an attack upon Edom, to recover the sovereignty over it, which his grandfather Jehoram had lost. But he weakened himself by a measure of worldly policy which displeased God. "He hired a hundred thousand mighty men of valor out of Israel for an hundred talents of silver." Israel, by which at this period, we are to remember, is only meant the kingdom of the ten tribes, was apostate; and God would not have His cause upheld by such aid, or by these defenders. The mercenaries would ruin the cause they came to help. "There came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee, for the Lord is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim. But if thou wilt go, do it, be strong for the battle: God shall make thee fall before the enemy: for God hath power to help and to cast down. And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." Men are never losers by obeying God, though it be upon a low principle. Amaziah had wisdom enough to listen to the admonition. He sent back his mercenary troops and conducted his expedition against Edom without them. This is what is meant, we suppose, by his doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord. No right act is ever overlooked even in a bad life. A signal victory was the result, and Edom again submitted

to Judah's yoke. But in his absence, the soldiers of Israel whom he had sent back, provoked by what they regarded as an indignity in the rejection of their aid, fell upon some of his cities, and smote three thousand men. Here were sown the seeds of new troubles. Our successes are sometimes the worst things that happen to us. This was not all. With Edom's spoils he brought home Edom's gods, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them. Thus there were wrapt up in his victory a quarrel with his neighbor and an idolatry that displeased God. All the subsequent evil would have been avoided, if he had been content to stay at home and mind his business. He is now settled in his kingdom, but alas! he is also an idolater, and he has acquired a passion for conquest and renown. He cannot keep still and cultivate the arts of peace. There is pride, hereditary ambition and bitter revenge in his heart, but there is no fear of God in him, to check them; and he does not know that an evil fruit of the victory in which he is exulting is that for his desertion of God, God has deserted him, and so the strength in which he glories is gone, and weakness has come in its stead. He cannot, I say, sit still and cultivate the arts of peace. He must punish his neighbor Israel for the wrong done him in his absence. His heart is burning with revenge and the pride of fancied power. How true it is that "the prosperity of fools destroys them." So he sends to Joash, the son of Jehoida, the son of Jehu, king of

Israel, and says, "Come, let us look one another in the face." In other words he proclaims war against him and challenges him to the combat. How bitter and contemptuous, and yet how wise and monitory is the king! "The thistle that was in Lebanon, sent to the cedar that is Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife. And there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle. Thou sayest, Lo! thou hast smitten the Edomites, and thine heart lifteth thee up to boast: abide now at home, why shouldst thou meddle to thy hurt? that thou shouldst fall, thou and Judah with thee." The warning was not heeded. On proud and wilful hearts admonitions fall with little force. The challenge was repeated. So they went up and *looked* one another in the face at Beth-she-mesh which belongeth to Judah. "And Judah was put to the worst before Israel, and they fled away every man to his tent." Amaziah was taken prisoner, the wall of Jerusalem was demolished, and the gold and silver and the vessels of the Lord's house were carried to Samaria. There is little else to relate of Amaziah. He lived on a few years, of which nothing memorable is recorded. The story of his reign ends thus: "Now after the time that Amaziah did turn away from following the Lord, they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem; and he fled to Lachish; but they sent to Lachish after him, and slew him there. And they brought him upon horses and buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah." And so his restless, feverish, inglorious life and reign

were ended, and left to point a moral in the word of God till the end of time.

And surely, that moral is not hard to find. It is a lesson of the evils that went with unsanctified success, a practical illustration of the wise king's saying, already quoted, "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them." This man began seemingly well. His first work was patriotic, lawful, perhaps commendable, the reduction of a rebellious tributary. He alloyed it indeed by a resort to instruments which God had not authorized. The Lord reproved his folly, and he yielded to the reproof; but there was in the submission no principle of fixed and conscientious obedience to the divine government. Success followed, large, illustrious, complete. But the false step at the beginning, and the worldly wisdom in which it originated, clung to it, and turned it in the end into a misfortune. It was an unsanctified effort, and, though prosperous, its issue was unblest. It awakened resentment and that in turn brought retaliation, and kindled those fires of an unholy vengeance, and a restless ambition, which ended in calamity and disaster; and so the victory was effaced in the defeat that followed. We see what there was in this work that rendered all the glory that resulted from it an unsanctified glory. It began in a reliance upon the arm of flesh, and not in God, and though that arm was abandoned at God's bidding, it smote in revenge of the desertion, and provoked an assault in which finally it gained a signal victory. Oh, how much better it would have been for Ama-

ziah, if he had first of all sought God and committed his ways to him, rather than, as he did, begin with acting on his own carnal will and worldly wisdom only, sowing thus the seeds of a disaster, in which all the good that flowed from his later submission to divine guidance was overwhelmed and obliterated. An error in our beginning, especially if it involves religion and moral obligation, is rarely eradicated; and though its mischiefs are averted for a time, they will be sure to return at a later period in some hidden form, to torment and vex us with their vengeful plagues. Ah, how little do men consider what an element of weakness and failure they are introducing into their lives, when they forget God at the outset, and lean to their own understanding, however they may seem to prosper in it for a time, cloaked from themselves and others by whatever decorous tokens of reverence for the divine will it may be. Their success is but the prosperity of fools; and though it may put on a temporary show of strength, its "root shall be as rottenness, and its blossom shall go up as dust." Amaziah's early prosperity then was unsanctified prosperity, because the fear and service of God did not lie at its foundation, though he was not without some sense of religion, and some practical regard to its behests. That is no effectual religion which influences a man on some occasions, and does not control him habitually. Look now at the fruits of this prosperity, the common, the natural results of such prosperity, not of Amaziah's alone, but of ours also, if we seek it in his way—idolatry, presumption, final failures.

Idolatry. He went into Edom and conquered it, and then brought home the idols of Edom, and worshipped them. That was paying a dear price for his victory, a perfectly gratuitous one moreover, for nobody asked it of him. And it was a very senseless thing, for these idols had just shown their inability to protect their worshippers. Yet he adopts them, and brings them to Jerusalem, and puts them in the place of Jehovah. Probably there was some pomp and splendor in their worship that fascinated him, and led him to take it to himself, and idolatry is always attractive to the unholy. We borrow idols from the world. We make them in our hearts, we find them in our ways, and fall in love with them; success and prosperity cherish and develop the tendency. We worship ourselves as all-wise, all-puissant; we worship our instruments, and "sacrifice to our net." We see the garish show of the world, and fall down to it. My brethren, it is very dangerous to succeed if we do not remember and serve God. It will estrange us further from him. It will bind us faster to the worship of the false, unworthy gods of the world. Beware! idolatry is destruction. The prosperity of fools destroys them.

Presumption. The appetite which unsanctified success begets is insatiable. It grows by that it feeds upon. Like the grave, it saith not, It is enough. It becomes bold, confident, daring. It presumes upon its strength, and fancies that there is nothing that it cannot attain, nothing that it cannot do. Its spirit is restless, boastful, aggressive. Ama-

ziah has conquered Edom, and now he must avenge Israel's insult, and conquer *that* also. The King of Israel warned him of his folly, but he would not listen. Thou hast conquered Edom. Be content. Tarry at home, and mind thine own business. Take care of thy kingdom, and the welfare of thy people. Why wilt thou meddle to thy hurt? It was good counsel, but it was not heeded. The bold, bad spirit that unsanctified success had produced would not be quiet. The fire of revenge and ambition must find fuel to feed upon. My brethren, this is not Amaziah, it is human nature. There is nought in it peculiar to him, we share it with him. Let a man in whom religion has not its proper ascendancy have his way, and he always grows bold, arrogant, rapacious. His desire rapidly increases. There is nothing that he will not aspire after, nothing that he will not essay to achieve. "He is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied." Alexander conquers the world, and weeps for other worlds too. Ah, brethren, there is nothing that will still conquer and satisfy the heart but God and his service. A restless, insatiable craving, that grows with success, and is hungrier the more it is fed—this is the fruit of ungodly prosperity. Is it not a destruction? Beware! surely the prosperity of fools destroys them.

Ultimate and incurable failure. "The triumphing of the wicked is short." The exultation is the prelude of a downfall, the more dismal and complete

for the previous eminence. "Thou hast lifted me up," says the Psalmist, "and cast me down."

"And thou, to make my fall more great,
Didst lift me up on high."

How much more was Amaziah's defeat by Israel to him, because of his prior victory over Edom, coming as it did upon him in the exulting flush of gratified ambition, and the confident expectation of continued victory. This again is not Amaziah, but man. There is no real, permanent success to the ungodly. In every success there is hidden a defeat, in every achievement a failure. All that is glorious and great about him is a "fading flower." He is but a gilded bubble that quickly bursts, an inflated film, painted with iris, that shortly collapses and disappears. He may have reverses in life. Probably he will. But if he does not, death comes, and what a reverse is that? his gains, his achievements, his honors, buried in the dust of the grave, himself a wreck, naked in the presence of God. Do you crave such a prosperity? God forbid! "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

XIV.

UZZIAH.

Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem.—II. CHRONICLES XXVI: 3.

LET us see what we can make of Uzziah this morning. We will get this king before us as distinctly as we can, and study him. He has been dead at least twenty-five hundred years, but his portrait, painted in colors that can never fade by the unerring pencil of inspiration, remains; and in it we may see the man, and estimate his value as a model or an admonition. The author of the Second Book of Kings calls him Azariah. Uzziah is probably only Azariah contracted.

We hardly dare to call him a good man, but he certainly was not a very bad one. The history records but one bad action of him; and that was one which, in our day, would be generally accounted a venial offence, scarcely an offence at all. He intruded into the priesthood, and on a single occasion undertook to minister at God's altar. God treated the offence with great severity, as though it were in his eyes a crime of magnitude. It mattered not that Uzziah was a king, and, under the theocratic consti-

tution of the Jewish monarchy, the earthly head of the Church. A king without a sacerdotal commission is no more a minister than a private man. Might does not make right, any more than popular notions of freedom and equality. David must not intrude into Aaron's office, any more than Aaron into his. Uzziah was smitten with a leprosy, and passed the remainder of his days in seclusion, and the government till his death was administered in his name by a regency. Crown, palace, sceptre he was forced to lay aside, and though still nominally the sovereign, he dwelt in a "several house"—shut up in a retirement, which, though it may have been royally adorned and splendid, no appliances could render aught but a virtual imprisonment, "and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land" in the father's stead.

Uzziah was but sixteen years old when his father Amaziah was assassinated, and he succeeded to the throne. This was his misfortune, and, coupled with the remarkable successes that attended the early part of his career, may account for the presumption that brought his happiness to so sudden and disastrous a close. For power and prosperity are wont to intoxicate youthful brains. At first "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." Like his grandfather Joash, he had a wise counsellor and guide in the high-priest, and as long as he followed his directions he did well. "He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of

God: and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper." Success crowned all his enterprises, and very signally, till he committed the fatal error that blasted his reign and his life. "He built Eloth, and restored it to Judah." This was a port on the Red Sea, from which Solomon had carried on his lucrative traffic with the East. Thus, he resuscitated and strengthened the commercial interests of his kingdom. He was also a brave and victorious warrior. "He went forth and warred against the Philistines, and brake down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities about Ashdod, and among the Philistines. And God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-baal, and the Mehunim. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah, and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened himself exceedingly." He gathered a large army, fortified Jerusalem strongly, and provided a large store of weapons, and all the implements and resources of war. And he was equally assiduous and active in promoting works of *internal* improvement. "He built towers in the desert, and digged many wells; for he had much cattle both in the low country and in the plains; husbandmen also, and vine-dressers in the mountains and in Carmel; for he loved husbandry." Surely Judah might congratulate itself upon its active, efficient, enlightened, prosperous young sovereign. The palmy days of Solomon and David seemed coming back, and the disgraces and failures of preceding reigns about

to be wiped away. And so, says the historian, waxing eloquent with his theme, "his name spread far abroad, for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong." It is certainly so far a beautiful picture.

And yet it appears that all this time the skilful painter of this series of royal portraits is in effect, if not in purpose, only touching up the outer edges of his picture so brightly, so artfully working in his brilliant lights and colors, in order to render the black spot in the centre, which is to be its characteristic and distinctive feature, the darker and more conspicuous. That centre is Uzziah; and all the beauty around it is but a fringing outskirts, serving to heighten the effect by contrast. As a king, he looks well. There are about him unequivocal signs of ability and usefulness. He acts his part in the stage of life nobly. He fills his high office with credit to himself and with benefit to the nation. And in such capability as he has shown there is much promise for the future. If his course is prolonged, to what may it not attain? There is even a seeming, perhaps a real goodness in him, while under the tutelage of the good high-priest. But prolonged and uniform prosperity, especially when united with high place and the ostentation and subserviency that inevitably cling to its skirts, is a severe trial, which none but a robust and hardy virtue can long endure. Uzziah's goodness gave way under it. Not content with his kingly honors, he will fain be a priest also. He is unwilling to admit that

there is any important thing in his kingdom that he cannot do, any honorable function that he may not discharge. It seemed a disparagement and limitation of his supremacy. Perhaps he argued that priestly powers were inherent in royalty, and that in exercising them he was but reviving suspended rights, and bringing back the usage of primitive times. The king was the priest of the nation in patriarchal days, as in the case of "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God," and there would be no lack of flatterers to applaud his purpose, for the opinions of kings easily find advocates and supporters. And so "when he was strong," says the narrator—notice, it is strength that makes men presumptuous and arrogant and daring—"his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the Temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him"—the high-priest Zechariah had died, but had left a worthy successor in his son Azariah—"and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men; and they withstood Uzziah the king and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests, the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense; go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honor from the Lord God." Bold words from subjects to their sovereign. Brave, true-hearted, faithful men, the priests that spake them; one is reminded of St. Ambrose

shutting the doors of the cathedral of Milan in the face of the Emperor Theodosius, and of Bishop Latimer discoursing in the presence of Henry VIII., in profane history. "Then Uzziah was wroth," the narrative proceeds, "and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah, the chief priest, and all the priests looked upon him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence, yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him."

And now hear the sequel: "And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord; and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the Lord." Wretched eclipse of bright hopes and cheering promises! Miserable termination of a fair and successful beginning! And all because a man in his heady pride and grasping ambition could not be content with a position and a sphere grand, dignified, and ample enough to satisfy every reasonable desire; but must grasp at more; and because, moreover, a man not lawfully called and appointed to it would presume to usurp that sacred office, which none, however high in place, or abundant in gifts, can innocently and safely assume but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

Let us reverse the order of these propositions and consider them consecutively. They make up the moral of Uzziah.

I. The instance before us illustrates forcibly the sacredness of the priesthood, and the danger of an unauthorized intrusion on its peculiar functions. Uzziah was a king, but this did not make him anything more than a private member of the sacred society, of which it constituted him the guardian and protector, and, to a limited extent, and in subordination to the divine law, in external things, its ruler. He was no more a priest by virtue of his kingly dignity than the lowest of his subjects. But his act in contravention of this truth, in taking upon him to do that which none but a priest might do lawfully, was a sin of all the greater magnitude, because his exalted station gave his conduct greater notoriety and influence. Yet if the king in his elevated sphere might be his own minister in sacred things, and by virtue of no right inherent in his royal office, it might be hard to show that any other man, in equal want of authority, might not with equal propriety perform the duties of the ministry in his humbler station. And, on the other hand, if in them it would be a usurpation, no reason could be given why it should be accounted anything better than a usurpation in him. That Uzziah was a king did not alter the case, unless sovereign power be a remedy for all defects of title, in divine as well as in human things; but it did add to the criminality of the act, because it increased its notoriety, and ren-

dered its influence more extensive and pernicious. All Israel might follow the evil example. Moses himself had called the nation a "kingdom of priests," and whatever exclusive power had been secured to the tribes of Levi, could be plausibly explained away by some ingenious sophistry, such as ambition can generally find to justify its flights, in favor of the broader grant which the words in their literal meaning might seem to convey. There are theories and systems that rest on weaker foundations. Thus the act of Uzziah, however he might seek to cover it by a claim of prerogative, did in fact involve a virtual abrogation of the priestly office, and a defiance of the decree to which the older rebellion of Korah had given occasion, that no "stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord." If it was not rebuked, the barrier which hedged in the sacred calling would be broken down, and all the benefits which God proposed to confer upon the Church and upon mankind by its institution be dissipated and lost. It was rebuked in the person of Uzziah, signally, impressively, awfully; and the leprous king, that aspired to be a priest without a divine calling and commission, stands a warning to all ages that men are not to take it upon them to "minister for men in things pertaining to God," without a clear and well-authenticated commission, on penalty of his awful displeasure. Where the act is there the displeasure is, and as long as the act is prolonged the displeasure continues. Time can never sanctify or make valid that which

began in disorder and self-will, though it may cover it with a show of venerableness and dignity. A chain grows no stronger by lengthening, if its first link is not properly attached. And though now no opening in the earth, or leprosy in the forehead marks God's anger as of old, because God no longer speaks to men supernaturally, an attentive observation of the signs of the times may perhaps discover proof of it in tokens scarcely, if at all, less unambiguous and decisive: in division and instability, in endlessly multiplying schism, in the decay of sound doctrine, and the substitution of fitful paroxysms of religious feeling for a steady and equable flow of spiritual life. We do not believe that the Christian ministry is any less divine than the Levitical priesthood, or that the commission it bears is less clear and definite. The conclusion is, that the intrusion into it, an usurpation of its powers, or a violation of its order, be it by prince or peasant, by scholar or unlearned, by good men ignorantly, or by evil men presumptuously, cannot be anything else but offensive to God, and fruitful of mischief to mankind. Nay, as the Gospel is holier, purer, more perfect, the corrupting and marring of its institutions must be so much the more criminal and injurious. God may deal graciously with individuals and bodies unconsciously and involuntarily involved in the evil, and gather among them bright gems in the day when he makes up his jewels; but the act in which it began, and all by which it is prolonged, he will always discover and frown upon. And while this is so,

King Uzziah, leprous at the altar in his unlawful offering of incense, will continue to be to the Church and the world a profitable and instructive object of contemplation.

II. And now to look also at our subject in that larger view of it which I have suggested above. We have all our sphere and our calling, and our honor and usefulness largely depend upon our understanding what it is and keeping in it. Its bounds are sufficiently well defined if we will look for them, and in getting beyond them lie much sin and disgrace. The good order and peace of society, and the happiness and improvement of individuals, are much furthered by a regard for them, much hindered by a neglect of them. In that beautiful and expressive similitude of the human body under which St. Paul describes the various offices and functions of men in the Church of God, he forcibly portrays the misery and feebleness which arise from any interference of one member in the province and work of another. It is so in every social aggregation: the Church, the State, the family, and whatsoever other alliance men may enter into for mutual helpfulness and comfort. And therefore God has thrown around these relations a sacredness, and made the breach or disregard of them a violation of his own holy law, and a rebellion against his own sacred authority. The Apostle, writing by inspiration, puts "busy-bodies" in "other men's matters" in company with murderers and thieves and offenders against the precepts of domestic purity; we are to

“submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake,” to obey “magistrates,” and always to remember that “the powers that be are ordained of God.” In the Church we are to obey them that are over us in the Lord, and, in the family, the child is to submit to the parent, the wife to duly respect the headship of the husband. We cannot all be chief. The result would be as monstrous and harmful as the absorption of all the limbs into the head. Nor are those in governing places to forget that they are under equal obligation to respect the rights of those inferior powers, which in their place rule by a right as divine as their own. The husband is to “give honor unto the wife,” the parent to the child, the magistrate to the citizen, the bishop to the inferior minister, the minister to the private Christian; “yea,” says the Apostle, “all of you be subject one to another,” and “honor all men.” The sun must not leave his supreme brightness to run in the orbit of an attendant planet. The system would be a wreck at once. Uzziah was a very good king, but he lost all honor when he undertook to play the priest; a sceptre became him; a censer made him a leper. You would gain nothing by climbing up into the pulpit, and I do no good by giving orders in your ships, offices, parlors, and kitchens. The effect would only be that “envying and strife” in which is “confusion and every evil work.” Nor is the inconvenience and discomfort the worst of it: look at the sin; it is rebellion against God. God has set us in our places. To stay in them, to be content

with them, and patiently, modestly, and faithfully to do the duty that pertains to them, is the obedience he asks—the measure of our service, and our salvation if faith work in it. If we will not, there will be a leprosy upon us, a worse leprosy than Uzziah's, a leprosy of the soul, a leprosy that will consume us in everlasting death.

XV.

JOTHAM.

So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.—II. CHRONICLES XXVII: 6.

HIS ways in the main were right; they bore the divine inspection; they obtained the divine approval. And they were not such by a happy *accident*, by a fortuitous coincidence; with God's mind they were such by preparation, by foresight, pains, and intention on his part; "he prepared his ways." And this preparation of his ways made him mighty, we are told, powerful in government, successful in war, a strong sovereign, a potent warrior. His ways were prepared before the Lord. Moreover, they bore the divine inspection, because they were fashioned under the eye of God, and carefully moulded in such a manner as to endure its notice and scrutiny. God's mind and will was the standard to which they were purposely adjusted. He set God before him, and in fashioning his course of life he had reference to God's presence and observation and mind. He was not of those who are "without God in the world," living by no rule or principle, or by some plan of their own devising, or by one dictated merely by human opinion or worldly fashion. God was a reality to

this man, and an influential reality; not a mere sentiment, that lay supine as a barren meditation or as the luxury of poetic thought; but a very solemn, weighty, and operative fact. It governed him, he "prepared his ways" in view of it, and it entered into them as a shaping and controlling force, and made them what they were, godly ways, ways conformed to God's will, directed to God's service, at least as to their main spirit and interest. Hence he acquired the reputation which the sacred historians accord to him. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," and so he is numbered among the good kings of Judah. Yet, mark, his goodness was not eminent, not like that of his descendants and successors, Josiah and Hezekiah. The kingdom was corrupt, and he did not do much to amend it; the Church was corrupt, and he did not do much to purify it. There were drawbacks to his goodness—alas! to what goodness are there not drawbacks—yet in him the drawbacks were somewhat serious and marked, rather uncommon drawbacks. He was good as his father Uzziah was good, the historian tells us; yet no one great stain rests upon his history like that which deforms Uzziah's, no presumptuous intrusion into priestly functions that brought leprosy upon him. Still, as his father's goodness was imperfect and maimed, so was his. It did not rise to any high pitch of heroism, or performance, or spirituality. He was not a reformer, when a reformer was much needed; not energetic in piety, when piety was generally unnerved. He was an average good man;

one of the rank and file, and not a captain, when the times wanted a captain, and it was the king's place to be a captain. One piece of service for God of his is alone thought worthy to be recorded: "He built the higher gate of the house of the Lord." But on the other hand it was stated that "the people did yet corruptly;" and the implication is, that what he might have done to restrain or correct them, he did not do. "Howbeit the high places were not removed; the people sacrificed and burnt incense still in the high places." Yet this blemish attaches to his reign in common with almost all the reigns of good kings. Only the zeal of a Hezekiah could grapple with that inveterate and antiquated evil. There were high places where the true God was worshipped, only it was done irregularly, because sacrifices could lawfully be offered nowhere but on the altar in the temple at Jerusalem. The offence was comparatively venial, and was so treated. Most good kings contented themselves with pulling down the high places of idols, and letting these high places of Jehovah remain, though they were unauthorized. In the language of Bishop Hall, "The kings abjured impiety, but winked at error." There is, however, another statement in regard to Jotham that is more difficult to understand. "Howbeit, he entered not into the temple of the Lord." How could this be in the case of a man of whom yet it is said that "he prepared his ways before the Lord his God"? It can hardly be that such a man neglected the worship of God in the temple altogether. The only sense that

can be given to the words consistent with this general statement is, that he did not enter into the house of the Lord as his father Uzziah had done in the character of a priest; he did not imitate his father's sacrilegious conduct in usurping the functions of the priesthood in the house of God. The leprosy, the awful memorial of his father's great crime, deterred him from its repetition, and kept him back from thinking that a king in God's house could be anything but an humble worshipper there like the meanest of his subjects. No high commendation is bestowed upon this sovereign; no one act of flagrant sin is charged upon him. His religious character stands fair on the sacred page. It is great praise for every man simply to say "that he prepared his ways before the Lord his God."

And therefore "he became mighty." This was his temporal reward. The account of this king's reign is brief, so that we know not much of what his might consisted in. Indeed it was not a momentous reign. No great result hinged upon it. For the most part it was quiet and uneventful. Yet such reigns are happy, happy for the sovereign, happy for the people. And the might that is ascribed to him lay chiefly in the benign pressure of his authority and the willing obedience of his subjects. It is war and commotion that make material for history. And the periods of which the historian has least to say are those of which mankind have most reason to be thankful. His reign lasted sixteen years, but his actual administration of the kingdom was much

longer, as he ruled over it as regent from the time that his father Uzziah became a leper, and dwelt in a "several house," and was secluded from the offices of government. And his reign was in its outward affairs prosperous. Besides building the high gate of the house of the Lord, which has been already mentioned, we are told that "in the wall of Ophel," which was the bluff or eminence jutting out from the southeastern corner of Jerusalem at the junction of the valleys of Kidron and Hinnom, "he built much," thus strengthening the defences of the city. And it is also recorded of him by the historian that "he built cities in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers." His reign was peaceful in the main, not disturbed by intestine commotions or foreign hostilities. One war alone is recorded as having occurred in it, and in that he was triumphant. He fought also with the king of the Ammonites, and prevailed against them. And the children of Ammon gave him the same year an hundred talents of silver, and ten thousand measures of wheat, and ten thousand of barley. "So much did the children of Ammon pay unto him, both the second year and the third." As he was but twenty-five years old at the time of his accession, he could have been but a youth when his regency began some years before, upon the retirement of his father from active life. And when his day had hardly reached its meridian, it ended. He died at forty-one. "And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David ;

and Ahaz, his son, reigned in his stead." The great prophet Isaiah began his ministry the very year that he began to rule in his own independent right; but we do not find in his prophecies any distinct allusions to this king or his administration. Yet doubtless the prophet's influence must have been felt as a support of his righteous course, and materially have aided him in maintaining that preparedness of heart in God's sight which made his life right in God's esteem, and infused vigor and efficiency into his government of the nation.

And now what shall we learn from Jotham for our own practical guidance and improvement? The gist of his life lies in this text: "He prepared his ways before the Lord his God," therefore "he became mighty." He is thus at once our example and our encouragement.

His life, if not very illustrious or distinguished in the annals of the world, had some power in it; it was not a cypher; it told upon his generation; it had a measure of force and influence; it achieved something, it accomplished something, it did a work for God and for man; there was an impelling strength in it, and it was not a failure, but in its degree a success; and the reason of this was that "he prepared his ways before the Lord his God," that he kept God in mind, and did not undertake to live without him or ignore him in his course of action, but took some care to make his ways such that they would bear His inspection in the principles, and motives, and ends that suggested and controlled them, and to

be sure that they were such as would please Him, and secure His approbation. Every such life is mighty, has in it an element of force that tells: without it a man's life, whatever great things it may boast, whatever great appearances it may put on, is intrinsically weak, rests on no solid foundation, accomplishes no substantial success. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." For to be strong in God's sense, and in the world's, are different things. The great things that worldly strength does are in God's sense nothings, while the things that God's strength enables us to do, though in the world's sense small, are in His sense somethings, and may be accounted more, and justly, than vast and stupendous doings that have not God in them, and, for the want of Him, are in their splendor dust and ashes; while with Him the feeble shall be as David; and they who are "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," under the mean guises of their lives work out imperishable and glorious results.

This preparing one's ways before the Lord our God—what is it, then?

First. It is the remembrance and recognition of God. And to how many who are not atheists in their creeds, is there no such remembrance, no such recognition. What to them is it that God is? They do not keep the fact of his being in their mind. He does not enter into their habitual circle of thought. The world to them would be just what it now is if his being was expunged from it. They would ex-

perience no great deprivation; life would not be materially different to them if he were taken away. God is to them a dead idea. They do not habitually recur to it. It does not move their feelings. It does not actuate their conduct. But if God be habitually thought of, and viewed as a living reality, a whole troop of new ideas, thoughts, sentiments, considerations come into the life. The world is transfigured and spiritualized. The essential principle of religion, is "Remember now thy Creator."

Again. It is to have regard to God's will. God has a law, and governs us by rules, and thus to remember God is to remember God's law. And then at once, the life, as it were, crystallizes around this centre, this nucleus. It takes form, and a determinate form; and, from being the spurt of caprices or circumstances, dictated to it by its own vagrant impulses or the opinions floating around it, it takes a determinate shape, and conforms to a fixed pattern, and so gains stability, firmness, regularity, and persistence. For it has a directory to which it can always resort, a test by which it can always determine its condition. Let others do as they please, and be tossed about by the variable tides of fashion, carried hither and thither by the winds of fickle opinion and interest; he has *one* question to ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—one rule to obey, "the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

Once more. It is to seek God's favor. Aims inferior there are, a plenty on every side. The fear of

man or his approbation solicits us with threats of harm or offers of advantage. The pleasure of speedy gratification allures us by addressing its offers and promises to our natural passions, inclinations, and desires. The world presents its baits in many forms of attractive good, specious shows of benefit, heights of honor to be climbed by easy steps, treasures of wealth to be gained by moderate endeavor, stores of knowledge whose very pursuit is sweet, and rich enjoyment as the fruit of success in all their lines of aspiration. But these are worldly ends. He that knows God knows that his pleasure is life, "that in keeping his commandments there is great reward," and that He is the only good, permanent and imperishable. This he chooses, and his heart is glad. The approving eye of God is the solace of this life, the hope of the life to come. This then is its principle, its rule, and its aim; this it is to prepare one's ways before the Lord our God.

And where it is, there will be might; the man will have a strength in him that will work out something in his life, and make it in its sum a success. Not the might of a king like Jotham, or of any high and influential position in society necessarily; but there will be a strength in it that will make it do something, and that a thing to be respected among men, and oh, how much greater a thing than that! to be laid up among God's eternal treasures.

There will be courage in it, the courage of a fixed persuasion that the rule it follows is right, and the good it aims at a reality, and the principle that

works in it adequate to all its demands and exigencies, that will keep it from vacillation and discouragement, or yielding to external intimidations, and enable it, amidst clouds and sunshine, trouble and delight, alike to say :

“I argue not
Against Heaven’s hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope ; but still bear up, and steer
Right onward.”

There will be efficiency in it ; it will do something ; it will produce effects. It will not be wasted in “beating the air.” It will “fight not as uncertainly ;” it will not be consumed in desultory labors without connection and unity, in random strokes without definiteness and coherence. Its labors will be concentrated, and so will tell. Its meaning will speak in St. Paul’s words, “this one thing I do ;” and being always directed to one end, by one rule, in one principle of action, the end being the glory of God and the favor that cometh from him only, it will, in all the multifarious small doings that occupy it, contribute to its design, as the many strokes on the hot iron upon the anvil bring it in the end “to an excellent work.” Such a man is certain to be useful ; certain to bring something to pass in his earthly existence ; certain to leave the impression that he has brought something to pass that is an appreciable element in the sum total of profitable human activity.

There will be success, for is not this success which I have just described ? This is what he aimed to

do, and has done; what he aimed to be, and has become. He is no abortion, no failure, nothing that has been in vain; but a good, well-developed, complete man, that has served his generation according to the will of God, filled an honorable place in the economy of social life, and secured a meed of praise from all whose praise is worth the having. And then when Christ "shall sit upon the throne of his glory," then shall come to him from "the excellent glory" the voice, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

XVI.

AHAZ.

This is that king Ahaz.—II. CHRONICLES XXVIII : 22.

AMONG the kings of Judah there are perhaps none worse than Ahaz, none more daringly and atrociously wicked. There is an emphasis in the brevity of our text that points out this evil eminence: "This is that king Ahaz." Who but he was capable of such deeds as the historian has to narrate?

Ahaz was the son of Jotham, a good king, who ruled long: first as regent, during the protracted seclusion of his father, Uzziah, on account of his leprosy, and afterwards as king himself. Jotham's goodness, however, as we have lately seen, seems to have been only of an average sort, not distinguished by any eminent attainments, services, or achievements. Yet it is said of him that "he prepared his ways before the Lord his God," and therefore "he became mighty." And this is praise with which a man may well be content of this good king. Ahaz was the evil son, intensely evil, God-defying, mischievous, bold, and energetic in his iniquity. How wickedness reached such an extraordinary development in him does not appear. Who his mother was neither of the histories that record his reign tell us. If Jotham had a bad wife, his weak goodness may

have easily been neutralized by the corrupt example and influence of a wicked woman. So it was, at any rate, that Ahaz was bad, very bad—so bad that his name became a sort of proverb of badness. His father died when he was but twenty years old, and at that immature age he ascended the throne to encounter the temptations of power and wealth which none but well-settled principles can successfully surmount. Doubtless, there hung around the young king a crowd of satellites and sycophants, ready to flatter and debauch him, like those who so fatally misled his ancestor Rehoboam. He reigned sixteen years, and they were throughout years of abomination and disaster. The historian says of him that he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God, like David his father. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel. “He sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places and in the hills and under every green tree.” He “made also molten images for Baalim.” “He burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire.” He was a great patron of idolatry, a zealot for it. All the forms and varieties of heathenism known among the Israelites he maintained and practised. Nor was he content with the paganism which he found already in the kingdom. He imported new shapes of idol worship. For when “King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tilgath-pileser,

king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus, King Ahaz sent to Urijah, the priest, the fashion of the altar and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof. And Urijah, the priest, built an altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made it against King Ahaz came from Damascus; and when the king came from Damascus, the king saw the altar, and the king approached the altar, and offered thereon." Thus "he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus which smote him." "They were the ruin of him," says the historian, "and of all Israel." Meanwhile the true God and his temple and worship he treated with scorn. He "gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord." "And the covert for the Sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the Lord, for the king of Assyria," to buy his assistance. And alas! in this furious devotion to these lying vanities he was seconded by a complaisant and unprincipled high-priest in the person of Urijah.

In this headlong career of sin, the hand of God arrested him, by bringing upon him a terrific invasion of his dominions. Pekah, the son of Remaliah, who then reigned over the northern kingdom of the ten tribes, entered into an alliance with Rezin, king of Syria, who ruled at Damascus, to overthrow the kingdom of Judah, dethrone Ahaz, and set up in his

place a usurping sovereign, the son of Tabeal. The king had made himself the centre of the nation's superstition, and in his mania for foreign religious practices was deeply immersed in the beastly and sanguinary observances with which the vile imaginations of men thought to honor them. The hand of God was lifted up to terrify and chastise him by the aggressive pride and cupidity of his neighbors. The timorous monarch, mean-spirited as well as base, quailed at the menace. "It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind." It was now that the Prophet Isaiah was sent to the terrified king, with an admonition not to be faint-hearted, for the "two tails of their smoking firebrands," as he contemptuously calls the fierce and menacing allies; for it was God's purpose to frighten but not to destroy King Ahaz; and when the king in mock humility or superstitious terror, declined the offer of a sensible sign of God's promise of forbearance, he gave him that wonderful prediction of the Virgin-born, which, whatever proximate fulfillment it may have had in days close at hand, found its true and only adequate completion ages after in the Divine Son of Mary. The oracle was fulfilled, and Ahaz and Jerusalem were spared; but not without a measure on the part of the king, which, while it wrought no real benefit to himself, brought in a power that a few generations later reduced the kingdom to ruin. To pro-

tect him against the threatened assault, he purchased the aid of Tilgath-pileser, king of Syria, a power then rising into might upon the banks of the Euphrates. The Assyrian king took Damascus, the capital of Syria, and it was at an interview with him in that city that Ahaz, who seems indeed to have purchased his help by becoming his vassal, saw the altar which he copied to supersede God's altar in the temple. But the deliverance came not till after he had been defeated by the troops of his neighbor Pekah, one of his sons slain, and a great number of his subjects carried into captivity by their northern brethren. And here the dreary story is relieved by an act of humanity, which ought not to be passed over in an account of Ahaz's reign. The condition of the captured touched a chord of brotherly feeling in the hearts of the captors, and aroused by the exhortations of the Prophet Oded, they "took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of the palm trees, to their brethren." An example of magnanimity not often equalled in the annals of human warfare. His deliverance from this invasion was however but a respite. Affliction did not reform his cause. The Edomites and Philistines assaulted him. The former took from him the port of Eloth on the Red Sea, the seat of the great Solomon's lucrative commerce. And his Assyrian

ally, whose aid he again invoked, "distressed him, but strengthened him not." No dealings of God indeed could cure him of his rooted love of idolatry and its attendant vices. "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: This is that king Ahaz." "And the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked." But this wretched reign came to an early end, to the relief of his misgoverned realm. At the age of thirty-six Ahaz "slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem, but they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel." The contempt and indignation of the nation marked themselves in that exclusion and in this scanting of the funeral honors of royalty. Only to a semi-royal sepulture his mortal part attained. And Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

I have two remarks to make upon this reign, and in them I will endeavor to comprise the moral of the account.

The first is, that there may be much religious activity, and no little concern and animation about religious matters, where there is no true religion. Viewed from one point, Ahaz was an intensely religious man. Scarcely any one thing seems to have occupied so large a space in his evil life as the concerns of religion. He expended large sums upon it. He busied himself in the erection of its shrines and altars. He took much pains about it. He made personal sacrifices for it, even to the extent of offering up his own children in sacrifice. Altars, images,

and fanes were thickly scattered throughout his dominions by a people emulous of their ruler's piety. He was tasteful and fastidious about his worship, and liked to have it elegant and splendid. The rude altar that Solomon had made in the temple, according to the prescription of Moses, of unhewn stone, did not suit his magnificent ideas, and so it was thrown aside, to be used for some superstitious purpose of divination, in order to make room for a grander altar of the Damascus pattern. Yet in all this multiplicity and profession of his religious doings, there was no religion in that high, spiritual sense which alone does justice to the word. The God in whom his breath was, and of whom were all his ways, he did not glorify, did not believe in, did not love, did not obey. His worship was misdirected to false, imaginary deities. Those that his fathers had brought in he cherished, and he imported more. And the worship he addressed to them was like themselves, sensuous, foul, inhuman—the sensual abominations of Baal, the dark, cruel rites of “Moloch, horrid king.” Jehovah perhaps was not utterly disowned, but he was systematically depreciated and neglected. Religious instincts he had, but they ran in wrong channels; religious sentiments he entertained, but they were tinged with the filthiness of lust, and the barbarism of cruelty, and all the baseness and frivolity of heathen superstition. When the true God comes near to him, though it is with an offer of favor, he shrinks from him, either in a pretended humility or a supersti-

tious awe. And in either case the prophet pronounces it to be a wearying of God with his stubbornness. He is like the demoniac that cries out, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?" The people became like the ruler; the debasement was general. There must have been a continual growth of superstition and idolatrous worship during the period before the reign of Ahaz. All the open and latent corruptions and unbelief of the people embodied themselves in this king. The low animal habits of the people declared on what objects they were setting their hearts; every high hill and grove showed how their religion was working with their natural tendencies, giving them a sanction, aggravating them, receiving back ever fresh corruption from them. The Prophet Hosea was a contemporary of this king, and describes his times: "Altars," says he, "are as heaps in the furrows of the field," as common and numerous. "Israel hath forgotten his maker, and buildeth temples." Such a union of religiousness and irreligion is always possible. So the people of Athens, St. Paul testifies, were very religious, and yet they were worldly, vain, licentious, full of empty disputations, and vile sensualities.

My brethren, Ahaz and his times are a warning to us. They tell us very distinctly that there may be religious activity, thought, care, expenditure, sacrifice, directed to a false god, or to the true God falsified in the low and unworthy conceptions of men, abundant and showy religiousness, and no re-

ligion. Not gorgeous temples and a grand ceremonial, not multiplication of services and rites and observances are religion. But they may become a substitute for it, and the awe, or the glow, or the gratification they awaken be mistaken for true devotion. The help of worship may take the place of worship. Our hearts are weak; let us take heed. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." That is religion. All this being busy about the externals of religion, without its inner power and graces, is putting the shell for the kernel. As expressions of it they are well. As compliances with God's will they are duty. As channels of God's grace they are help. But underneath them all there must be that deep sense of personal sin which leads the soul in lowly contrition and faith to the cross of Christ, before which it is changed into "a new creature," in its affections, principles, aims, and motives. And without this no glitter, or costliness, or punctiliousness of observance is aught better than a deception to the man, and an unregarded offering to his Maker.

The second remark is, that an early accession to the possession of wealth and power is always a severe trial, and many times a fatal misfortune. Ahaz was a king at twenty, too old for a regency, too young to rule. Immature and unfashioned, he was set to rule others before he had learned to rule

himself, under a scheme of government in which there was little restraint upon the sovereign, except the law of the Lord, which he neither knew nor cared for. What to him was the command that the king should make him a copy of the law, and keep it by him as the man of his counsels, in a day when there was a "famine of . . . hearing the words of the Lord"? Meanwhile, the means of unlimited indulgence were his, with none to check or restrain him in their use, at the very age when the appetites and impulses are pressing for indulgence with the fervor of their first, fresh force. Not strange is it that the young man under such circumstances should have had his religious instincts drawn toward the idolatry that sanctioned and even sanctified his pleasures, rather than to that severer form of belief which sought to bridle and restrict them. And then, when danger threatened, and voluptuous Baal could not help, how natural to turn to bloody Moloch, and propitiate him and buy his aid, even by casting his own offspring into the fire in the horrid valley of the son of Hinnom, and, when no shrine of gentler divinities could succor him, resort to Tophet for aid. Alas for Ahaz! the victim seemingly of the very facts and events in his condition which excited pride and complacency in himself, and admiration and envy in beholders. How true it is that the "turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." How dangerous a thing it is to have wealth and power without restraint in early life, with the strong passions and heady conceits

of that age suffered to work their way without hindrance or rebuke. The subject of such a misfortune, miscalled advantage, will be apt either to forget God altogether, and live a life of atheistic self-indulgence, or lay hold on that form of religion that offers least resistance to his inclinations, and opens the widest door "to the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life."

Measurably, my dear friends, the misfortune of Ahaz is every day repeating itself in the world, and perhaps not often more plainly and commonly than in our age and land. Restraint is not the fashion of the day, and early and large indulgence its rule. The home training, which is the best school for men, is not prosecuted with the patience and fidelity it justly demands. The result is a precocity of manliness and independence, and a free use of means, not friendly to virtue or any permanent usefulness. And alas ! the shipwreck that too often follows.

Let me say a few words to parents and those who have care of the young. Let there be no haste on your part to rid yourselves of the guardianship, with which God has intrusted you, and its cares, or shorten the pupilage of those over whom you exercise it, and hasten the time when your charges shall be left to themselves. "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame ;" and so far as his faults are justly attributable to a neglect or hasty removal of proper control, it becomes a deserved stigma on all who have thus forgone their duty. The condemnation of Eli was, that "his sons made themselves vile,

and he restrained them not ; ” and so at last, a broken, wasted old man, he fell backward and brake his neck. Govern while government is needed. Govern mildly, but firmly. Govern patiently, and above all in God’s fear.

And one word to the young. The independence and indulgence you are longing for is your bane. Be content to wait till you are fit for them, and then they may be a blessing. “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.” Have right principles of religion fixed in your minds, and incorporated into your life. Then you will know God and serve him, and not become the victims of idols, “the world, the flesh, and the devil.”

XVII.

HEZEKIAH.

He trusted in the Lord God of Israel ; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.
—II. KINGS XVIII : 5.

HEZEKIAH, of whom these words are said, was a reformer. The good son of a bad father, he illustrates the saying of Ezekiel, “ Now, lo, if he beget a son that seeth all his father’s sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like, he shall not die for the iniquity of his father ; he shall surely live.” None of the kings of Judah sank lower in wickedness than Ahaz ; none, our text tells us, before or after him rose to so high a pitch of goodness as Hezekiah. An exception is not made even in favor of his pious and exemplary great-grandson Josiah. For worth and usefulness Hezekiah stands foremost among the kings of Judah. None were equal to him that preceded or followed him. This is large praise indeed. And as it is inspired praise, it must be just praise—“ praise of God,” and who shall gainsay that ? He was a reformer, and his work was one of great magnitude and difficulty. His father Ahaz had been an active patron and promoter of idolatry in its grosser forms ; and with this and all the moral abominations that follow in its train, the king-

dom was fearfully demoralized. The erection of altars in all parts of the country had diffused the idolatrous venom into all orders and ranks of men. The palace and the cottage alike did homage to Baal, and Ashtaroath, and Moloch ; and the rustic villager, as well as the elegant courtier, was poisoned and befouled with the reeking pollution. From the prophets of Jerusalem had profaneness gone forth into all the land, so that "the whole head was sick, and the whole heart faint." To purify such a country was indeed to cleanse an Augean stable, and called for a man of faith, nerve, zeal, energy, and wisdom ; such a man was Hezekiah ; and in his successful performance of the mighty work, he won for himself the high praise contained in our text. And if his work was not as radical and permanent as his pious ardor aimed to make it, it was only because "man's breath is in his nostrils ; and wherein is he to be accounted of?" Before a good man's work has had time to harden into sufficient strength to abide, he is forced to leave it, in obedience to the inexorable decree of mortality, to him that shall come after him ; and "who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?" Hezekiah's son and successor, Manasseh, was, in the sense of Scripture, eminently a fool. The only tincture of wisdom he ever had lay in the tardy repentance of his latter days, fruit that was gathered from the sweet uses of adversity. Hezekiah enjoyed throughout his reign the advantage of a wise counsellor in the great Prophet Isaiah, by whose advice and instruction he was to a great extent guided.

He was one of the three eminent names, in after ages, held in chief estimation among the Jews. "All," says Ecclesiasticus, "except David and Ezekias and Josias were defective: for they forsook the law of the most High, even the kings of Juda failed." Yet, he was not a perfect man; success betrayed him into pride, and pride led him into ostentation. He was smitten, and miraculously delivered from the jaws of death. A sign akin to that vouchsafed to Joshua, in the going back of the shadow on the dial of Ahaz ten degrees, attested the divine purposes of mercy to him. To the ambassadors of the king of Babylon, who came to inquire after this wonder, he unwisely displayed his wealth, and provoked God's anger. "God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." But "he humbled himself for the pride of his heart," and God was appeased. He lived in splendor and opulence, and when at last he died, "they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honor at his death."

He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His life was not long, for he died in the flower of his age; and it was a troubled life, from the early beginning of his reign on to its close, much filled up with toils and conflicts. When he was thirty-nine years old, his strength was broken by a sickness that brought him to the verge of death; and though fifteen years were then added to his life by a special

divine grant, doubtless it was life with weakened vigor and chastened feeling. The shadow of his predestined decease was continually hanging over him—as he himself says, “I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul.” Yet he was on the whole a prosperous man. His efforts told; his enterprises succeeded; his arms were victorious; he lived in wealth and honor. “Hezekiah,” writes the historian, “had exceeding much riches and honor, and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels; storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. Moreover he provided him cities and possession of flocks and herds in abundance, for God had given him substance very much.” “And many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah, king of Judah; so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth.” Truly he was a magnificent and illustrious monarch.

But, what is far better, he had that true riches, without which a man, whatever be the abundance of his worldly possessions, is poor. He “wrought that which was good, and right, and truth before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.” “He clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments which the Lord commanded

Moses." A true lover of God, a true keeper of His law, a zealous maintainer of His ordinances, a liberal supporter of His worship, looking amidst his power and splendor for a heavenly crown, and setting his heart upon heavenly treasures. Such was Hezekiah spiritually; and if, in the annals of the kings of Judah, by deeds and services he came to be accounted the great, yet by virtues and acts of religion none earned for himself more truly the higher title of the good.

The life of this king naturally falls into three divisions: his reforming measures, his want and deliverances, his sin and its correction. We may consider them successively without reference to chronological order.

On his accession to the throne he found the religion of his kingdom in a state of dismal decay and ruin. The doors of the house of God were closed, and the services of the Mosaic law, if not wholly discontinued, were slighted and maimed. In his father's reign, the high-priest even had lent himself to his mad schemes of innovation, and had made for him a fancy altar of the Damascus pattern to supersede the ancient altar of God. Shrines and altars were thickly sprinkled through the country for the worship of the heathen deities that usurped Jehovah's place. The rites with which they were served were lascivious, obscene, and yet, with that strange alliance between lewdness and cruelty which is not unfrequently seen, they were to be propitiated by severe inflictions, and even human sacrifices. In this horrible misdirection of the religious instincts, Ahaz

had himself taken part. No doubt there were men in Israel who had kept themselves clean from the abounding pollution, who "sighed and cried" over the evils of their times, and prayed, "Lord, how long?" And we may well believe that it was in answer to their prayers that Hezekiah came. To redress these evils and restore the religion of his subjects to its pristine integrity was his aim. And in pursuing it his work was strictly one of restoration. He had no nostrums of his own, no inventions of new things to put in the place of that which it was his purpose to abolish. To put things back where the wretched apostasy of the nation found them, was his single work, and he had confidence in God that divine institutions and appointments brought duly into use would vindicate their own claims, and become instrumental in reviving perished faith and reclaiming the people to virtuous practice. To accomplish this object, his means were well chosen and faithfully used. The temple worship was reinstated; the passover was kept with a splendor not witnessed in many years; the scattered remnants of the Ten Tribes, whose territory had been ravaged and depopulated by the Assyrians, were invited to participate in the solemnity; the altars and images of false gods were removed and destroyed; and even the brazen serpent which Moses made in the wilderness, for fear of its perversion to superstitious purposes was broken in pieces and called Nehushtan. In all this work the king took a personal part, guiding the actors in it by his example, and cheering them by

his counsel and instruction. So Hezekiah's reformation stands as a pattern of a true reformation. Its design and effect were restoration, not the invention and establishment of new methods and forms. He did not believe in development and progress of religious institutions. When he would get things right, he would get them as they were when they came from the hand of God. There is in this particular a striking analogy between this reform and the English Reformation of the sixteenth century. The design was not to make a Church, or to adorn a Church with novel devices of man's wisdom; but to cleanse the Church from defilement and corruption, and make it what it was when it came from the hand of its Creator, and he pronounced it very good. And when religion has fallen into decay in any age, we are to profit by this hint, and not to seek its resuscitation by new measures, by novel devices calculated to promote excitement or act upon the nervous sensibilities of men, but by a more diligent, careful, and serious use of appointed means and instrumentalities that have upon them the stamp of a divine authority, the reparation of God's house, the orderly, solemn, seemly celebration of His ordinances, the regular and reverent observance of His worship, a due regard for His ministers and their sacred commission; in fine, by putting into a condition to act with more freedom and efficiency those *old* institutions which God has given, and promised to bless to the accomplishment of their sacred design. Much less are we to venture upon the formation of some

new system and set up a Church of our own creating, to take the place of that old Church which is one, and which bears the signature of Christ upon its charter; or make a new ministry of our own in place of that ministry which he has promised to be with "to the end of the world." Christ's institutions can never grow effete, obsolete, and outlawed; but the folly of men can corrupt them or let them fall into desuetude and neglect. And then they need only to be revived, purified, and properly set forth, to recover their pristine power and efficacy, and then under their influence dead hearts will revive, true servants of God take courage, and sinners be converted unto God. Hezekiah was a wise reformer, and his example tells us how to maintain religion in its proper vigor, and how to recover it to life and power when it is faint and declining. "Ask for the old paths."

If we now pass to the consideration of the wars and escapes of this king, we shall at once see that the conspicuous thing in his reign, in its external relations, is the invasion of Sennacherib. The sacred writers describe this with a minuteness and a glow not common in their usually brief, calm, and general historical notices. Very evident it is that it is intended to be set forth as one of the Church's most signal deliverances, and one of the most remarkable interpositions of divine power in her behalf. Twice it is narrated in the sacred Book—in Second Kings, and Isaiah—in almost the same words, besides a briefer and more general statement in the Chronicles. It is the theme of much of the magnificent poetry of Isaiah, who

has exhausted his utmost wealth of words and images to set forth its majesty and greatness. It is the "lighting down" of Jehovah's arm, "his breath like an overflowing stream," like the "flame of a devouring fire." The prophet's words, in describing it, marshal themselves like a mighty and conquering host marching out to the battle, and move with the measured, stately step of "an army with banners." Sennacherib was a mighty monarch, and his invasion of the land filled it with terror and dismay. Isaiah, the noblest and most eloquent of the prophets, was the king's counsellor and comforter in this and in every emergency. From him the king gained the serene confidence with which he viewed the threatening danger, and the people too grew calm under the example of their monarch. "The people rested themselves on the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah." Well might any nation repose on one to whom even now the world may turn as a signal example of what is meant by faith, as distinct from fanaticism. A threatening and insulting message comes from the boastful invader. Hezekiah goes up to the temple, and spreads it before the Lord, and receives through Isaiah an assurance of safety. The land is overrun, and a mighty host is encamped near Jerusalem. To human eyes escape is impossible. But the king and the prophet are calm, for their trust is in God, and their confidence is not misplaced. "It came to pass that night that the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thou-

sand." The morning light saw the host annihilated, and the city intact and safe. "One of the least religious of English poets" has been inspired by the solemn catastrophe to write of it religiously:

"The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold.
Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset was seen.
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath flown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strewn;
For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed.
The tents were all silent, the banners alone;
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord."

We have looked upon Hezekiah as an example of wise zeal: here we have him before us as a pattern of enlightened faith. He tells us where to go "in all our troubles and adversities, whensoever they oppress us," assures us of comfort and support, and animates us to hope for relief and deliverance from God's gracious hand beyond our expectations. No case is desperate with God. The Christian should never despair of God's cause or his own when it is righteous.

There is one other aspect of this king on which we must look, in order to draw from him the full measure of the instruction which he is capable of affording. This remaining view is less comely and attractive than the preceding ones, for it exhibits him to us as after all but a frail and imperfect man. And

yet it has comfort for us, feeling, as we must, that we are such men ; assuring us that the men on whom the Scripture hesitates not to put the divine imprint of goodness are nevertheless such men as we are. The Scripture, with its customary impartiality, tells us of Hezekiah, amidst its praises of him, that he “ rendered not according to the benefit done unto him ; for his heart was lifted up.” It is a strong heart indeed that can bear prosperity. Hezekiah in religion is a reformer, in war firm and fearless ; but in prosperity he is vain, foolish, and self-confident. At some period of his life he fell sick. The connection seems to indicate that it was when Sennacherib’s invasion was impending. And Isaiah came to him with the awful message, “ Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed.” For he deemed, and rightly, God’s decree conditional and not absolute. The prayer prevailed, and God promised him by the mouth of that prophet an addition to his days of fifteen years. And in token of the wise fulfilment of the promise, the “ shadow of the degrees on the sun-dial of Ahaz,” some creation of his father’s for measuring time by the sunlight, went ten degrees backward, “ by which degrees it was gone down.” It was a miracle, but it was easy to God ; nor need we trouble ourselves to speculate about its relation to the general course of nature.

“ But can it be, one suppliant tear
Should stay the ever-moving sphere ?

A sick man's lowly-breathed sigh,
When from the world he turns away,
And hides his weary eyes to pray,
Should change your mystic dance, ye wanderers
of the sky?"

It is not ours to answer that question. The fame of the miracle spread into the neighboring lands, and messengers came from kings "to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land." Ambassadors came from even the great king of Babylon, to congratulate him on his recovery, and learn about the miracle. And then "God left him, to try him; and that he might know all that was in his heart." It was too much for Hezekiah. The latent pride of his heart showed itself. He was betrayed into an ostentatious display of his wealth and greatness. Hezekiah was glad of them, and "showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures; there was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah showed them not." Dangerous, fatal ostentation. The sight awakened the cupidity that was never satisfied till, a few generations later, Babylon made the country a prey. Venial fault we should call it, if indeed we accounted it a fault at all. But it awakened the displeasure of God, and expedited the destruction of a nation. The king's great mentor, Isaiah, soon brought him word of God's displeasure, and the consequences it would entail. And the good king's heart, smitten

with a sense of his folly, bows in penitence and submission to the Lord's just threatening. "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. He said, moreover, for there shall be peace and truth in my days." What a solemn lesson is here. How it tells us not to trust in our hearts, because they are "deceitful above all things," and therefore "he that trusteth in his heart is a fool." Our zeal for God in active labors, and our patient trust in him in seasons of danger cannot shield us against the pride that is wont to creep into our hearts, and swell them up with a sense of personal consequence, such as will cause us to behave ourselves unseemly, and vapor in airs that will draw down upon us the rebukes of Heaven. Against this subtle mischief we cannot be too watchful, for it can eat out the heart of a very fair life, and make it in its seemliness an offence to God. "He that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

XVIII.

MANASSEH.

And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him : and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.—II. CHRONICLES XXXIII : 12, 13.

THE death of Hezekiah, and the consequent interruption of his reformatory measures, were quickly followed by a relapse into the abominations which he had labored to suppress, and the nation greedily returned to the vile indulgences into which Ahaz had led them, with an appetite whetted by the temporary abstinence into which his pious son had constrained them. Idols and idol worship had disappeared, with the loathsome and revolting practices and spectacles that attend upon it ; but idolatry was not purged out of their souls. Still they set up their idols in their hearts, and when the pressure that had kept the inclination hidden was removed, they went back to their old ways with a violent recoil, “turned aside like a broken bow.” And in this sad backsliding they were countenanced and sustained by this youthful sovereign, the son and successor of

Hezekiah, a boy of only twelve years old, on whose immature and unfixed principles it seems probable the old courtiers of his grandfather Ahaz, kept in check by the strong hand of his godly father, sought, and too successfully, to impress the stamp of their own predilections and desires. A pleasure-loving youth, anxious to secure the favor of the people, and the aid of the prominent and influential in the outset of his reign, beset with flattery, and lured by the baits of indulgence, he easily fell into the snare, and was easily led to believe that in re-establishing idolatry he was serving his own interests, and securing the harmony and peace of his kingdom. To such lessons Manasseh was an apt scholar, and soon Judah was again what Ahaz had left it, with such novel touches of iniquity in addition as a corrupt mind could supply. The picture, as the sacred historians paint it, is sad to contemplate. "He built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove as did Ahab, king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards; he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger." Manasseh "seduced them to do more evil than did the

nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel." He did "wickedly above all that the Amorites did which were before him." The sin of the besotted nation culminated in his frantic misrule, and called down the awful doom, a few years after so signally fulfilled, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold! I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it both his ears shall tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab; and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down."

Yet at last, when calamity overtook the wretched king, and he was carried away in captivity, reflection followed. He thought on his ways, and repented with a repentance "not to be repented of." He was then a "brand plucked from the burning." At last Manasseh knew that "the Lord he was God." But did not Manasseh know this before? Doubtless he did, at least to a certain extent and theoretically; for although he was an idolater, the idolatry that prevailed in Israel, that worship of Baal and Ashtaroth and Moloch, did not involve the denial of the true God, though Jezebel and her wicked posterity had robbed Him of His due honor, by associating Him with inferior deities, and lowering His character to the standard of their own grovelling and unworthy conceptions. Manasseh was the son of the good Hezekiah, but it was his misfortune to be deprived of his godly parent at an early age, before pious instructions and example had completed their good

work upon him, and his principles and purposes had strengthened into sufficient firmness to resist the corrupting influences of power and luxury. At the age of twelve years the youthful prince succeeded to his father's throne, and very soon proved recreant to his father's principles, forgot his father's God, and became an open professor and patron of the worship of idols. How different might have been his career and character if he had grown up under the reforming and restraining hand of such a father as Hezekiah! How irreparable to a child the loss of a good parent, especially if he be born to the inheritance of wealth and consequence! We know not into whose hands he fell upon his father's demise, but probably into the hands of such men as were wont to haunt the court and palace of a minor king—men bent only on their own selfish schemes of aggrandizement and gain; men ready to ingratiate themselves with their youthful and confiding sovereign, by flattering his vanity and ministering to the gratification of his desires, that they may prey upon his bounty and use his name to justify and sustain their deeds of rapacity and oppression. It was the misfortune of Manasseh to pass the most critical period of his life, his transition from youth to manhood, in an atmosphere so fraught with moral corruption, unfavorable to the formation of manly sentiments, holy purposes, and virtuous habits—a court, the court of a youth, himself the victim of a deadly miasma; the beams of his own glory exhaled under such influences, and the better impressions of earlier teachings were speedily erased;

and he emerges into notice a worldling and an idolater, a stain upon his country's annals, for fifty years a scourge and a corrupter, himself at last saved, but only "in the furnace of affliction," and "so as by fire." Yet we cannot believe that he spent the first twelve years of his life in the family of so faithful and zealous a worshipper as Hezekiah without receiving impressions which lingered with him through all his subsequent long course of unbelief and sin, and which, revived, not newly made, were the instrument of his recovery to the service of his father's God in the closing stage of his life. It was a father's teachings and a father's example recurring to his memory in the solitude and desolation of his exile, and the memorial of a father's prayers and services coming up before God as a powerful argument in his behalf, that wrought his conversion "after so long a time," and made the uses of adversity far sweeter and more beneficial to him than all the advantages of his abused and presumptuous prosperity. It is not ours to "limit the Holy One," who "hath mercy on whom he will have mercy;" but we may reasonably believe that if Manasseh had not been the son of a Hezekiah, the subject of early instructions and prayers, "beloved for the father's sake," his captivity in Babylon might have operated only to embitter and harden his spirit, as affliction does in too many instances, and have driven him in his blindness and desperation farther from God and righteousness and salvation. There were other influences besides the natural operation of his reverses in Manasseh's

recovery, influences of truth and grace : of truth, long before implanted and smothered, but not extinguished ; of grace, that came not fortuitously or capriciously or arbitrarily, but according to a law of God's spiritual kingdom, the law whereby he shows "mercy to thousands of them that love him, and keep his commandments ;" the law by which the prayers and deeds of good men are kept in heaven as a precious and enduring treasure ; the law whereby Hezekiah wrought in the prevalency of his intercessions, after he had lain in his grave a half century, intercessions that were living seeds of a rich and happy harvest after long years of barrenness and apparent death ; a law which brought upon the sinful monarch that severe but merciful dispensation, which, by virtue of the sources of spiritual life which were mingled with it, became the occasion of delivering his soul from death. And these considerations taken together render the case of Manasseh one of the most instructive and profitable on record in the Scriptures. It exhibits to us the history of one who was born heir to the throne ; but also to the far richer possessions of a wise and pious father's example, instruction, and prayers. He reached the throne and lost the father just as he was about to enter upon that stage of life in which character takes its decided shape, and from which all that follows is apt to receive its determinate hue and fashion. He became his own master and the master of a kingdom before he had attained any fitness for the difficult office of governing himself or others ; unprincipled and selfish

men, sycophants and corrupters, stood around his throne, ready to pervert his principles and mislead his counsels for their own benefit or pleasure. Power and luxury tend to intoxicate youthful minds, powerfully operating to fill them with pride, wantonness, and presumption. To such men and such circumstances a child, well taught and well trained, yet a child, fell an easy prey; and under their unhappy operation passed to manhood, in spite of such teaching and training, an evil man. He plunged headlong into a career of irreligion and wickedness, and persevered in it many years. The beginnings of good in him, if any had been made, were destroyed and lost. For a long time he prospered. He had forgotten God; God appeared to have forgotten him. The determination concerning him seemed to be, "He is joined to his idols: let him alone." But there were thoughts of peace toward him in the mind of God, purposes of good and not of evil. There were prayers registered in his favor. There were traces of early instruction, hidden underneath the rubbish accumulated in that corrupt and darkened mind. God sent upon him at last a reverse of fortune, seemingly in wrath, really in unspeakable compassion. He was dethroned and carried into captivity. "By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept." Splendor, plenty, power were gone. The greatness of his former condition served by contrast to aggravate the sense of his present wretchedness. But his tears were healing and restorative. To him, as an immortal and accounta-

ble being, Babylon was better than Jerusalem, his house of exile than his royal court. The departure of his pomp and honor made room for the entrance of salutary reflections. The season of sadness carries the soul back to childhood. Happily for him, childhood contained provisions and promises of a better life than his history had realized. He heard once more his father's voice. He beheld once more his father's ways, and his father's prayers were pleading for him on high, even as his father's goodness was pleading with him below; and so "when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him; and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." Nor was this repentance superficial and transitory. It brought forth in him "the fruit of good living." It yielded to him the "peaceable fruit of righteousness." He devoted the remnant of his days to God and duty, to reform and reparation, to the practice of piety and virtue, and to the promotion of religion among his people. For we are informed by the historian that "he took away the strange gods and the idol out of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed therein peace-offerings and thank-offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel."

He went to his grave in peace, and was gathered at last to the company of his fathers, and of all the faithful departed in the paradise of God. Is not this "a brand plucked from the burning"? How much encouragement is there then to hope and pray and labor perseveringly for the conversion of sinful men, and especially of those whose early youth has been blessed with holy prayers and pious instructions. We are not to despair of any man. Few cases ever presented a more desperate and discouraging aspect than that of Manasseh. His wickedness began early and continued long. He grew into manhood a bold transgressor. He "framed iniquity for a law." His sin was high-handed, public, and shameless. He grew hoary-headed in sin. He had not only thrown aside the restraints of truth, but he had sanctified falsehood, and found a religion to sanction his sins and turn them into a semblance of piety. Still he was not beyond repentance, not incapable of repentance, for he did repent. There were avenues to his heart still open to the approaches of the Spirit. There were resources in divine providence sufficient to bring back his soul from the pit. May it not be so of any man who is going on still in his wickedness? Ah! let us never despair of the sinner. Let the sinner never despair of himself. God may not have given him up; it may be that he yet waits to be gracious to him. It is not ours to utter decrees of reprobation on ourselves or on others.

Again, let not any sinner be deterred from effort to deliver his feet out of "the snare of the fowler,"

by the thought that he has been long a sinner, and grievously a sinner. Listen not to the thought, that "there is no hope." It is the devil's suggestion. True, the leopard cannot change his spots, nor the Ethiopian his skin; but *God* can. He *will* if his power is duly invoked. He is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. If there are any of you here present who have lived long in transgression and stupidity, I call upon you to awake and bestir yourselves to-day; yes, "to-day after so long a time, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." And further, let us not think that the time is gone by when we may be of use to any with whom we have to do. Let us not give over prayer and effort for any irreligious friend or relative on whom time is setting the footprints of decay, and marking them for the grave. Who knows what purposes of mercy God may entertain toward them, and by us? Is their case more desperate than Manasseh's? And yet he was saved. Why may not they be saved? If their case ever does become desperate, it may be that our neglect to pray and labor for them shall make it so. God reclaimed Manasseh by adversity. But he has other reclaiming agencies. Our word, our example might be such. While the wicked live, then, let us not cease to hope that they live to be subjects of mercy, nor fail to live and act before and toward them as those whose blessed mission it may be to become to them instruments of mercy.

Specially is all this true of those whose childhood was consecrated by the prayers and instructions of religious parents ; for there is a peculiar and very available ground of encouragement in regard to such. The child of a Hezekiah may be a Manasseh ; but, there is always good reason to hope, a Manasseh in his repentance, as well as a Manasseh in his sin. There is no truth more certain than that the earliest impressions are usually the deepest and most lasting ; and experience shows that such impressions may survive long oblivion, and revive with great liveliness and power after a protracted interval of inaction. I can never think that man is given up to hardness of heart who reverences the memory of a devout mother or an exemplary father. Besides, the faithfulness of God is concerned in every such case. The parents' prayers have come up as a memorial before God and are registered. More especially does he stand pledged by the terms of his covenant when they stood before him at the font with their child, and he promised to grant all those things that they prayed for ; "which promise, he, for his part, will most surely keep and perform." That child he took into his family, received it for his "*own* child by adoption," "incorporated it into his holy Church," made it a member of Christ, "a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven ;" and while that child lives, there will always be great prevalency with God in that act of its parents, and in their prayers in its behalf, persuading him powerfully to be long-suffering toward it, and not

cut it off in its sins. I do not say that such a child cannot be lost; but I do say that there is always peculiar reason to hope that such a child will be saved, and I must appeal to all such who may hear me this day on this ground. God grant it may not be without some beneficial effect. You remember the time when you dwelt within the atmosphere of a religious home. You had "line upon line, and precept upon precept." You were taught, so soon as you were able to learn, those "things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health." The service of God was recommended to you with all the earnestness and tenderness of affection. Prayer went up for you, fervent and faithful. You were baptized and given to God, and accepted by him. The sign of the cross was imprinted upon you in token of your duty and privilege. And yet you are a Manasseh, not perhaps in the extent of his vileness, but like him following the course of this world, living in subjection to the "spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience." Oh! are there no lingering recollections in you of those early scenes of the holy dead, of prayers, of good words, of wise counsels? If there are, the memorial yet speaks for you and in you. God hath not given you up to impenitency and ruin. He calleth you to repentance. "Hear, and your souls shall live."

Nor as it seems to me is this consideration less forceful and inspiring to religious parents. We are impatient beings, and not ready to believe that we accomplish anything unless we see our tokens, and

those very plain and unequivocal. The hearts of parents are too often discouraged because they are not favored with immediate and visible evidences. They have had their children baptized; they have taught them; they have prayed for them; they have endeavored to exemplify the influence of the Gospel in their presence. Still, they are worldly and wayward. They evince little sensibility to religious considerations, little tenderness of conscience, little knowledge of the truth. They are growing up in irreligion, as they have grown up to the service of the world, if not to "sit in the seat of the scornful." Now all this is truly melancholy, and yet it is no argument for unbelief or despair or negligence. It does not warrant them in saying that their labor has been in vain, nor authorize them or others to withhold their efforts in other instances. Though we believe not, "yet He remaineth faithful; he cannot deny himself." It may be that God hath not forsaken your child; that "his seed remaineth in him" still; that your prayers are not forgotten, your labors not obliterated, the grace of holy baptism not withdrawn. Not every seed that is sown springs up and grows immediately. Not every seed that is buried in the soil, and mingled with it till it is no longer distinguishable, is lost. There is life in the Egyptian bulb that has lain in the shrivelled hand of the dead for thousands of years; and genial warmth and moisture will yet cause it to grow. "Be not weary in well doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not." "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for

thou shalt find it after many days." God remembers your prayers, though he does not yet visibly answer them. Your good seed is imbedded in the soil, and will yet spring up and bear fruit. Hezekiah's piety bore fruit after fifty years on the distant banks of the Euphrates. You too shall reap sooner or later, you cannot tell when or how; it may be on a death-bed, in a felon's cell, on the battle-field, or the sinking wreck. Yes, then a parent's prayer and counsel may come into remembrance, and save a soul from death. For "he that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, and bringing his sheaves with him."

Finally, let us all beware lest by our abuse of God's mercies we draw upon our heads his chastisements, which yet are truly in such cases greater mercies than all that have gone before them. The goodness of God leadeth us to repentance. He draws us "with cords of a man, with bands of love." Judgment is his strange work, for "he doth not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men." Yet adversity is often profitable. It cools the burning thirst after earthly pleasure, and it opens the heart to the influence of things not seen. It is God's last expedient for the recovery of man from sin. Alas! how often we render its employment necessary, by refusing to be benefited by gentler means. How often do we compel God to say, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst, I will not hear." "In the day of adversity consider." I would that they who are living irreligiously in ease and pros-

perity would be sensible how fearfully they are endangering their blessings, what a necessity they are laying upon God in mercy and faithfulness to take them away ; we say to you therefore, that are living sinfully in the midst of comforts and blessings, what Daniel once said to Nebuchadnezzar, "Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor ; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity." God blessed Manasseh many years, and he only grew harder and bolder in sin. He smote him, deprived him of his splendor and power, and sent him into exile to save his soul. It was true kindness, but it was a form of kindness which nothing recommended to God but the obstinate perverseness of His subject. Manasseh the exile, when he humbled himself and prayed and was forgiven, was a happier man, and a more suitable object of congratulation and envy, than Manasseh the powerful and prosperous, but idolatrous and sinful king. But he might have been forgiven without such a terrible reverse. Alas ! for human wilfulness and folly ! God's mercies are rich, constant, innumerable upon you. They call you to his service with a voice of tenderness and gentle persuasions. Turn and live ; lest he visit your "iniquity with stripes" and your "sin with scourges."

XIX.

AMON.

Amon was two and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned two years in Jerusalem: but he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father.—II. CHRONICLES XXXIII: 21, 22.

HIS reign was short and barren, and its end was tragical. No particular acts of his are recorded; probably there were none to record. Two years comprised his period of power. He came to the throne at the age of twenty-two, and he was but twenty-four when he perished by a violent death. The two historians who tell us what little we know about him unite in saying that he was a bad man. He did evil in the sight of the Lord. He imitated the wickedness of his father Manasseh, but he did not imitate his repentance and reformation. He maintained the gross and manifold idolatry which Manasseh had established and patronized. He “sacrificed unto all the carved images that Manasseh his father had made and served.” He walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them. “And he forsook the Lord God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the Lord.” In all that was wrong and sinful he was like his father before him; but in

the single particular that formed the redeeming feature of his father's life he was unlike him. "He humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more." His wickedness grew and increased to the very end of his brief career. And that evil career was cut short by violence, may we not say happily for the king and for the people; for who can say what such a course—a course that had attained such a ripeness in sin so early—might have come to if it had been prolonged? "His servants conspired against him and slew him in his own house," perhaps worn out with his tyranny and insolence, or it may be moved to contempt by his weakness, and desirous to rid the land of a sovereign that vexed and disgraced it, or seeking to avenge some personal wrong or accomplish some prospect of personal advantage, gain, or ambition. "He was buried in his sepulchre in the garden of Uzza," and, as it might seem, not laid in the royal place of burial, a mark, not improbably, of the low estimation in which his subjects held him. And yet it appears that the mass of the people were not in sympathy with the conspirators who took his life; for it is stated by both the historians that the people of the land made Josiah, his son, king in his stead, thus nipping in the bud some projected usurpation, it seems probable, which the conspirators may have covered up under a show of zeal for the public weal. The sentiment of loyalty to the house of David had not died out among them, weakened as it was likely to

be by the misconduct of evil kings, even of such monarchs as Manasseh and his corrupt young son. This is just about all we know of Amon. It is meagre knowledge indeed, but its very meagreness may in some sort make it specially profitable to us. For, as in other bad kings, evil has assumed a specific shape, in some great act or in some leading trait of character, which has engrossed our attention, and been the principal subject of notice and comment in speaking of them, in this instance we have evil more in the abstract, evil as it is in the sight of the Lord, in its intrinsic vileness, as it stands in the view of him, who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil," and who penetrates the true essence of all sin as it is in itself, and weighs it in the balances of a perfect equity.

Of Amon then it is said that "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," with no specification of facts, save the general statement that he revived and perpetuated the idolatry which his great-grandfather Ahaz had established, and his father Manasseh had restored after its suppression by his grandfather, the pious Hezekiah. And for this course it may be said, in way of extenuation, that idolatry to him was hereditary and educational. His very name, Amon, supposed to have been given him in compliment to an Egyptian god, stamped it upon him. It was the form of religion in which he had been reared, and was all the religion that he knew or had opportunity of knowing. As he was but twenty-two when he came to the throne, it is

evident that his whole previous life must have been spent under the influence of that base, gross superstition, which, saving in the few closing years of life, his father had delighted to promote and foster. And these years of reform at the close of Manasseh's life were all too few to undo the mischiefs of his many years of transgression, or loosen the hold of a showy and sensual worship on a youth who had grown up under the influence of a creed that preached to him indulgence and luxury as a religious service.

There are three points here that may well engage our attention—evil as it is in itself, evil as it is in the sight of the Lord, evil as it assumes the shape of an idolatry.

First then, as to evil, what it is. The word is very comprehensive, and includes everything that is bad, anything that is not what it should be, everything that is contrary to the true welfare of intelligent beings; and in this comprehensive sense we use it when in the Lord's Prayer we pray "Deliver us from evil." There is, perhaps, no description of it better than that which the Catechism affords, "All dangers, both of soul and body . . . all sin and wickedness . . . our spiritual enemy and everlasting death. It is with spiritual evil, however, that we now have to do—moral evil as distinct from physical evil, of which physical evil is but the dark shadow in this world. And moral evil is sin, for when it is said that Amon was evil, it is not meant that he was an unhappy man, but that he was a wicked man. Now "sin,"

according to St. Paul's definition, "is the transgression of the law," that is, of God's law, or, by a stricter translation of his language, lawlessness, including all inward opposition or contrariety to God's law, as well as all overt deeds of disobedience to its requirements. But if we will get nearer to the bottom of the subject, we must consider that God's law is not arbitrary, that he makes nothing wrong which was not wrong in itself antecedently to all exertion of his will in regard to it, and nothing right that was not in its own nature always right; that he commands nothing to be done that was not by some inherent quality in it fit to be done; that he forbids nothing to be done that was not in its inherent quality unfit to be done; and thus that his law is but the expression of his mind in regard to things as in his infallible judgment they are good or bad—such not simply *because* they are commanded or forbidden, but also because there is something in themselves which forms the *reason* of their being commanded or forbidden. The substance of this law as it is embodied by our Saviour himself is love to God and man. Hence, sin, which is the transgression of the law, an opposition to the law, is, in its essence, selfishness, the setting up of self-gratification, self-indulgence, self-interest in some form as the rule or end of life, running out into the myriad forms of wrong, wrong in the individual man, and wrong to others, which deform human life, and infest and debase human society. Evil is the dominion of this vile principle in an intelligent soul. An evil man is the

man in whom this principle reigns, whether it pours out its shame in flagrant excesses which the common voice of human society condemns, or moves in those decent shapes which cover up their baseness in harmless, comely, sometimes even laudable and useful exhibitions, and are *not* the object of general reprobation. And therefore it is that every man, whatever be the outward aspect of his life, needs to be born again, made a new creature, in order that this vile principle may be dethroned, and the true principle of love set up and established in its rightful domination. For evil is born with man, and is in him from the first: man in his moral nature has to do with God, who knows him thoroughly, and not with purblind men, whom he may deceive, by a hypocrisy or a deception that includes himself, into a false estimate of his moral condition and value.

And therefore it is that the sacred historian is careful to tell us concerning Amon, as inspiration is wont to do concerning evil men, that "he did that which was evil *in the sight of the Lord*," which is our second point of remark. This alone determines the reality of evil in him or in any man. He might be evil in the sight of men, and not be evil; and might not be evil in the sight of men, and be evil. That which God sees to be evil is evil, and equally true is it that that which God sees to be good is good. For he alone penetrates to that core of our nature where alone the true fountain and determining source of our life abides, and whence all the dubious and contradictory issues of practice flow

forth into notice to puzzle, and bewilder, and mislead men. But never can they in the least perplex or deceive him whose eye is ever fixed on that central principle that determines the quality of the character, however strange the disguises which the visible life may assume. Others they may embarrass or delude; Him they never can. "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed." And therefore full oft the things that are highly esteemed among men are "abomination in the sight of God." So Simon the sorcerer might have worn an ambiguous aspect to the Christian men with whom he had consorted. He had abandoned his magical arts; he had preferred faith in Christ; he had been baptized; he had joined the company of Christian disciples. He had committed but a single fault, he had asked the privilege of selling spiritual gifts for money. Perhaps many people nowadays who are not rejected from Christian fellowship exhibit faults quite as great, or even greater than this. But God saw that his heart was not right; and St. Peter, by his inspiration, knew the divine opinion of him and declared it, "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God." And that judgment was infallible. There was no evading it, no appeal from it, no resort to any possibility of mistake to parry it. My brethren, it is a solemn thought, that we are just what God sees us to be, and that he sees us to be, every one of us, just what we *are*. The judgment of men upon us is very fallacious and uncertain. It is not by any means always a candid and impartial

judgment; and if it is, it is exceedingly liable to error, liable to be perverted by the observation of much that it cannot understand, or that it misinterprets. "It is a small thing," says St. Paul, "that I be judged of you or of man's judgment; he that judgeth me is the Lord." To the soul conscious of right this is a great comfort; but even a soul so conscious is not infallible. It may not have a perfectly right standard, or it may not apply its standard fairly. There is but one Judge that cannot err, that knows the right exactly, that knows the man perfectly, that applies the standard to the man without a shadow of weakness or bias or misapprehension. Ah! that which is right in the sight of the Lord is right, that alone, certainly. Much will be called right that is not right by this rule; much that is not called right may yet be right in the main underlying principle, spite of blemishes and faults in detail, and those not small, by its determination. The subject is large, and, as a subordinate part of this discussion, cannot now be pursued fully. The really good man is God's good man, but the world's good man is not always God's good man. The world may have some standard of goodness which is quite different from God's, and then its favorable verdict will be good for nothing in reference to the great final discrimination which is to sever the wicked from among the just, and yet it may deceive and satisfy not only itself, but the man who likes to hear smooth things about himself. And then, again, a thousand things may operate to put upon the outward life of a man

close resemblances of real goodness, to make him in seeming what real goodness would make him, and yet the inward principle of goodness may be wanting in him. And, on the other side, a man who has that principle in him may, by untoward influences and circumstances, be drawn into many faults and offences, and even grievous ones; and an uncharitable world may regard his claims to goodness with ridicule, and call him a deceiver and a hypocrite, while a juster and more discerning eye may see in them naught but pitiable weaknesses and misfortunes. He may be the world's evil man when he is not God's evil man, just as another may be the world's good man when he is not God's good man. The thing for us is to be God's good man. The misfortune of Amon's case was that he did that which was evil *in the sight of the Lord*. Ambition, perhaps some sense of personal injury, did lead some men to conspire against him, and assassinate him. But it is not certain that he was an evil man according to the sentiment of many, or even the prevailing sentiment of Judah. He was an idolater, but idolatry was in vogue. Men are not wont to condemn severely that which they practise themselves. In the vices of idolatry he was involved; but idolatry sanctifies the vices that enter into its rites and observances, and to those who really believe in it, such vices are no longer wrong. Probably there were many in Judah who even admired what was worst and vilest in Amon's character as proof of religious zeal and devotion. But he was evil in the sight of the Lord, and that made all

such false, misguided estimates of men of no account to him. That determined what he was, settled his moral value. There was no loving God in his soul, no unselfish devotion to the principle of right ; no holiness, no intelligent, willing obedience to the law of God, no enthroning of that law in his heart as the supreme arbiter and judge of all his acts and ways ; no conscientious desire and determination to do the will of God from his heart. Ah ! then, he was an evil man, whatsoever men might say of him, whatsoever judgment of man might acquit him, whatsoever leniency of sinners might extenuate his evil practice. My brethren, our great care, that can never be too anxiously and too continually pursued, should be to have our hearts right in the sight of God. Nothing is well with us as long as we are evil in the sight of the Lord ; virtues, worldly moralities, conventionalities, conformity to some current standard of conduct, amiabilities, amenities that men praise and magnify, religious observances, punctilious and multiplied, are nothing as long as our Lord looks upon us and says, " I know you that the love of God is not in you." " Create in me a clean heart, O God ! and renew a right spirit within me."

Finally, and this is our third point, the evil in Amon assumed the form of an idolatry. And into this shape one naturally runs. In him it existed in a very gross and offensive quality, in the direct service of fictitious deities, whose worship was loathsome and corrupting. The reforming effects of

Manasseh's repentant years but imperfectly remedied the mischiefs of his earlier course, and he handed on an idolatry in which his son had been reared and educated, to become again, under his favor and patronage, the religion of the court and of the kingdom. A late repentance, though it may avail to save the soul, will not undo the consequences of a protracted life of error and wickedness. But though in Amon's case there was an open paganism to which he had fallen heir, there is a real paganism in all courses and forms of evil living. The heart will worship something; and if it does not worship God, it will worship that which, because it is not God, is a usurper of God's place, and therefore is an idol. Our age is by no means free from this danger and this evil. There are many in this day who will not worship Christ, and who entertain but loose and vague ideas of the divine Being. They call themselves rational people, and boast their peculiar exception from the trammels of superstition and of traditional notions. But they are devout worshippers of humanity, and of no humanity so much as of their own, which they exalt into an oracle by which they presume to try God's revelation, and all else that calls itself divine, undertaking to determine what God must be, and what he has revealed, by their new reason. And this worship of self, if it do not find some intellectual idol to fasten upon, will run out into some supreme devotion to some worldly pursuit after the tangible forms of worldly good under which the soul carries on its secret inward homage to itself, while the God

in whom its life is, and whose are all its ways, it does not glorify. St. Paul says that "covetousness is idolatry;" and it is probable that the word he uses is good enough to include all other varieties of inordinate, excessive desire. And St. John thought it not unmeet to warn a Christian people to "keep themselves from idols." Oh, brethren, it is awful to know that if we are doing that which is evil in the sight of the Lord—and we are certainly doing so if our hearts are not set upon God and his service—we are not without a god whom we are serving; we are so made that we must have a god. There is something to which we do devote ourselves with all our powers and faculties, something under which we make our idolatry of ourselves our slavish dedication to some selfish end. Let it be money, and our devotion is covetousness; the supreme aim at accumulation, either to shine in the eyes of men in the glitter of wealth by expenditure, or gloat upon the thought of it in a miserly keeping. Let it be greatness, and then is our worship ambition; to be eminent in some form, raised above the many, to be the object of their admiration and their envy, and sit in a proud, cold conceit of our own superiority, to court by unworthy acts the offerings of flattery and applause. Let it be pleasure, and then its devotion is sensuality; some satisfying of the flesh, and its appetites and passions, either in frivolous amusements and gaieties, or in the beastly indulgences of drunkenness, or lust, or some besetting passion for present enjoyment. Oh, my brethren, are these

things our god, our religion? How unworthy of intelligent and immortal beings we must feel them to be. And yet there is no alternative if we will not have the Lord for our God, and consecrate ourselves sincerely and unreservedly to his service. Such service of the world is not always successful. Success is not its badge. Covetous men there are who are never rich, ambitious men who are never great, sensual men who have no large measure of joy. Still is their god this world, and though they be decent, respectable, and do not become blotches on the face of society by reason of some overt enormities, but are well spoken of, as men will always be who do well unto themselves, yet are they evil men; evil in the sight of the Lord, and therefore evil according to a judgment that never erred; and going into the unseen world with such an unredeemed and unsanctified nature, it has no joys for them, naught but that fearful greeting, "Eat the fruit of thine own way, and be filled with thine own devices." God help us to know ourselves, renew us unto his own image, and enable us to walk in newness of life.

XX.

JOSIAH.

And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and behold, they are written in the lamentations. —II. CHRONICLES XXXV: 24, 25.

OF the sovereigns of Judah, Josiah was in many respects the most remarkable and illustrious; certainly the most valued in life, and the most lamented in death. We do not even except his great-grandfather Hezekiah, of whom it is said that none excelled him who went before him or followed after him, but who seems not to have so enshrined himself in the nation's heart. His case stands in very striking contrast to that of that ancestor of his of whom it is said by the inspired writer that he departed "without being desired." Our text tells us what grief his death occasioned; how universal, deep, and lasting it was. It pervaded all classes in the nation. It awoke a universal wail among his people. A prophet made it his theme. The sons and daughters of music uttered the national sorrow in mournful numbers. Poets told it forth in elegiac verses. A permanent observance kept it alive. He

was a great reformer, and in seeming he was a successful one; but his reform was but a gleam of sunshine in the close of a dark day, or the bright flush of the woods that betokens the setting in of winter. It was the deceitful hectic flush, and not the ruddy complexion of health; yet his reform, though short-lived, was beautiful and deserving of honor. Pious Jews of later times looked back upon it as a revival of the faded glories of the national religion, and tenderly cherished the memory of the monarch who conceived and executed it. "The remembrance of Josiah," says Ecclesiasticus, "is like the composition of the perfume that is made by the art of the apothecary; it is sweet as honey in all mouths, and as music at a banquet of wine." He behaved himself uprightly in the conversion of his people, and took away the abominations of iniquity. He directed his heart unto the Lord, and in the time of the ungodly he established the worship of God.

Amon was but sixteen years old when his son Josiah was born; and when the father was murdered, at the early age of twenty-four, the suffrages of the people, in their loyalty to the line of David, placed Josiah on the throne at the age of eight, overriding and defeating the usurping aims of the conspirators who had slain Amon in favor of another. The sovereignty of such a boy must at first have been nominal; but with the manly strength of his ripening and unfolding powers, that work began which has made his name so conspicuous and illus-

trious, and entitled him to the high praise bestowed upon him by the unerring words of inspiration, as one who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not "aside to the right hand or to the left." His was the glorious distinction of a life in all its main course without deflection from the path of rectitude, a steady stream of goodness and righteousness and truth, the well-developed and matured fruit of the Spirit. The early death of his father was doubtless a lesson to him; sad to think that this can ever be the case; perhaps his mother, Jedidah, was a woman of a better spirit. And it is at least probable that there were gathered about the boyhood of the king some or all of those who afterward were his coadjutors unto all good things: the pious Shaphan the scribe, the good high-priest Hilkiah, Huldah the prophetess, Shallum the son of Tikvath, and most prominent and influential of all, the great prophet "Jeremiah," by whose instruction and example his character may have been moulded to the excellence which it finally attained. Thus have there ever been, in the worst of times, those who have kept themselves pure and not bowed the knee to Baal, and so have preserved alive the spark of godliness till "times of refreshing" came. Early in Josiah's life, in "the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young"—but sixteen years old—"he began to seek after the God of David his father; and in the twelfth year," at twenty, "he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from

the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images." Having before purified his own life, he now entered zealously upon the work of a reformer of his kingdom. He prosecuted the work from the first with energy and success; but an incident which occurred six years later, when he had arrived at the age of twenty-six, gave a new impulse to his zeal, and roused him to higher conceptions of the necessity, and urgency, and solemnity of the work before him. Henceforth he engaged in it with greater intelligence, and with exacter ideas of its nature and details. The temple, during the long reign of his idolatrous grandfather, and the short but corrupt rule of his father, had fallen into neglect and disrepair. Deserted for showier and more popular worship, it had become shabby and dilapidated; perhaps it had even been rifled and damaged to furnish adornment and material for the fanes of Manasseh's fanatic paganism. To restore the temple to its pristine and rightful beauty was one of the good king's worthy undertakings. And while this good and fitting work was going on, Hilkiah, the high-priest, found in some obscure corner of the sacred edifice a book of the "law of the Lord given by Moses," which had lain neglected and forgotten during the long preceding period of apostasy. The Pentateuch was perhaps the only Scripture then known and recognized as sacred. Existing only in manuscript, the copies of it were few, and it was not the common hand-book of men as the Bible is in our favored day. In idolatrous periods it was prob-

ably proscribed, and, as at the time of the Reformation, such copies as were found were committed to the flames; specially likely was this to be the case in the reign of Manasseh, when idolatry was so daring and shameless. There was thus a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord, and Josiah without the Scriptures was forced to act somewhat blindly in his measures of reform. But "to him that hath shall be given;" and so now opportunely the hidden Word came to light, found where perhaps pious hands had secreted it for concealment and preservation, in the days of insecurity, to guide and enlighten the king in his commendable work. So "unto the godly ariseth light in the darkness." Yet the discovery filled the king with consternation and dread. The book was a book of terror to him, and when Shaphan read it before the king, "the king rent his clothes." Its awful denunciations showed him the imminent danger into which his kingdom had brought itself by its departure from God's service. The warning, however, did not benumb but stimulate his endeavors. The task of purging the land from all the symbols and traces of the prevalent idolatry was persevered in and carried forward with resolution and thoroughness. His coadjutors in the work besides Jeremiah were Habakkuk and Zephaniah. Jehovah's land was to tolerate no signs or reminders of the worship of the "gods many" that had defiled and dishonored it. The idols were burned or ground to powder, and scattered to the winds. The shrines of all false deities were oblit-

erated so as to be no more revered or recognized. And even the sacred groves, which partial reformation had hitherto spared, were cut down and burned with fire. The nation was solemnly reconciled to its God by a formal renewal of its covenant to be the Lord's. The services of the temple were resumed and performed with a punctilious obedience to the ritual injunctions of the Law. And such a passover was kept as had not been seen in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet. The contagion of reform spread itself into the territory of the old kingdom of Israel, portions of which along the border were now, it might seem, subject to Josiah's authority. And at last the calf worship instituted by Jeroboam ceased, and the bones of its priests were dug up and scattered upon the altars; those of "the man of God which came from Judah," who had been told the event in the days of Jehoram, and of that "old prophet" that beguiled him, were alone excepted. The impetus of the royal earnestness carried the people along with it. The nation seemed to be regenerated, and henceforth during the remaining fifteen years of Josiah's reign stood before the eyes of mankind a God-fearing, a God-honoring, God-serving people.

But the faithful record will not let us suppose that Josiah was perfect. The infection that doth remain in them that are regenerated was in him, and his life, though the historian tells us that he died in peace, the peace of a clear conscience and a sure hope, terminated in disaster and bloodshed. War

fell out between his potent neighbors of Assyria and Egypt, and Josiah was unwise and weak enough to meddle to his hurt, and take the part of Assyria in the war. Perhaps it was worldly policy, the hope of ingratiating himself with what he regarded as the stronger party. Perhaps it was the vainglory, begotten of his prosperity, that led him to make himself the companion and equal of mighty kings. But whatever was the motive it was sin, and it led to fatal results; it cost him his life when he was but thirty-nine years old. They "came to fight in the valley of Megiddo," in that plain of Jezreel in Esdrae-lon, which had been the battle-field of so many wars. "And the archers shot at King Josiah, and the king said to his servants, Have me away, for I am sore wounded. His servants, therefore, brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah."

Yet the amendment he effected was but superficial. The heart of the nation was not rectified; the old leaven was not purged out. The moment the pressure of power was withdrawn the people started aside "like a broken bow," and the kingdom was again the kingdom of the times of Manasseh and Amon, and not of Josiah's days. The people were conformists, not converts. There had been little spiritual improvement, little revival of true godliness, of the religion of the heart. Idolatry was still most congenial to the nation, and when it might it reverted to its idols. It was the business of Josiah's

sons to undo what he had done, and under their weak misrule the ruin, to which the fatal mistake that cost him his life opened the door, rushed in like a flood, and soon became a universal deluge. The history clearly shows this. The reform of Josiah had little depth. It lay pretty much on the surface of things. Israel was spiritually a corpse, and though for a time it was a corpse painted into the semblance of life, it was a corpse still.

Now this is very instructive and monitory to us. Men are not made religious by setting them to practise its forms; nor is it by any means certain that the "outward and visible" will be followed by the "inward and spiritual." It may settle down into a lifelong falsehood and delusion. Mechanical religion may be very exact and punctilious, and even burden itself with the abundance of its services and observances, and yet be without heart or vitality. Never, apparently, since its going forth had the law of Moses obtained a fuller expression and a more exact and complete observance than in the days of Josiah; but to how small an extent the principles of religion had found their way into the hearts of the Jewish people, and become the animating and controlling force in their lives, the sequel shows. The appearance of goodness conjured up, as it were, by the wand of a magician, vanishes when his hand becomes no longer able to hold it. So in our Saviour's day a most careful and elaborate regard for the externals of religion prevailed, while its hollowness and its heartlessness called forth from him the sharpest

and severest reproaches: "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." It may be so in all ages. And, therefore, the outward condition of religious observance, or any success or progress in promoting a more particular attention to ceremonies, rites, and visible appointments, appliances, and occasions of worship, can never be a very precise and satisfactory gauge of religious prosperity or religious advance.

Apply this principle to ourselves. "God is a spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." In the heart is to be laid the foundation of a genuine religious character, in the inward fear and love of God's holy name, in a filial reliance on his goodness and conformity to his will, in repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. But now suppose with a religion more or less clear and correct, in order to obtain it or practise it, as the case may be, we set ourselves to the diligent observance of its outward appointments, and measure our attainments in it by the correctness, regularity, strictness, and facility with which this observance is carried on, we may become the dupes of a piece of most grievous self-deception. Notice, I say nothing against the observance. It is right and proper, and in a great regard for it may well begin a religious life. But then if the conception of that life be erroneous or indefinite, and man be only aiming at a vague something of which he has not a correct or precise idea,

he may mistake his routine for piety, and rate his growth in religion by the amount of his mechanical performance of its forms. But religion is loving faith in the Redeemer, and the love and fear of God in the soul. Let not man think that the observance itself is religion, or the infallible means of producing it. Let him understand what religion is, and be ever aiming to cherish and strengthen it, and judge himself by the consciousness of its inward presence and working, or else his religiousness may grow into the dead crust of a lifelong Phariseeism, or be like the goodness of Josiah's time, "as the morning cloud and early dew that goeth away."

And the same principle is of like importance in our treatment of others. To do good to the souls of men should be the aim of us all, and as opportunity is given us we should be active in that work. How important is it then to understand what that work is. If we simply persuade men or set them to attend to the external parts of religion, we may make formalists and not Christians. If we set before them what a Christian character and life are, and then urge them to the punctual and faithful use of the ordinances and observances of religion as a means which God may bless to the development and increase of vital religion in them, and admonish them at the same time that the effect will not follow infallibly, but only as they steadily contemplate the inward essence of religion, and steadily strive for it in the use of those means, we may be the happy and honored instrument of saving souls from death, and

turning them to righteousness. But if we are content with inducing them to practise the outward forms of religion, and leave them to infer that this is religion itself, and that it is strong and lively just in proportion to the multiplicity and punctiliousness of the practice, we may look complacently upon the result of our labors when God may see in it nothing to approve, and may pass off upon a neighbor whom we would fain benefit for the blessed reality of God's service but a pitiful and empty imitation. Well does the apostle pray that our "love may abound more and more in knowledge and in judgment," that so we may know how to "speak a word in season to him that is weary," and be wise reprovers and teachers of our fellow men in the things of God, never mistaking ourselves nor leading them to mistake the means for the end, and thus becoming blind leaders of the blind.

There has arisen in our day an extensive desire to bring back into the Church the piety of ancient times, and it is proposed by many to do this by bringing back ancient forms and usages—or what are presumed to be such—and by multiplying their use, and making them splendid. I say presumed, because I am well persuaded that much of what is called ancient is not ancient enough to be any authority for practice; that many of the presumptions rest on insufficient grounds that will not bear examination; and that, when traced to their real dates and sources, they lose all title to respect. The effect has been to introduce in some quarters a scenic

worship of elaborate form and gorgeous display in multiplied ceremonies, vestments, and services, spreading over the Church's sober worship an array of costly glitter and sanctimonious parade. Far be it from me to speak with indiscriminate censure of that which in many instances has originated in a sincere devotion and an honest purpose of usefulness, in convictions which even when in error are too earnest and respectable to be treated with harshness or derision; which has been practised and pronounced right by men of great purity and spirituality, and has allied itself with works of charity, with mercy and good fruits, which deserve imitation rather than criticism. Yet it is impossible to repress the opinion that under this movement, bodily exercise, that profiteth little, will be substituted for the actings of faith, and "the sighing of a contrite heart;" and that postures, motions, and gestures of the body will take the place of pious sentiments and emotions of the soul; while a glorious and elaborate ritual will attract the attention and wonder of many in whom the great truths they are intended to represent and symbolize will exert little power. And with this fear and clear perception of the prejudice and alarm such exhibitions create in many minds, it can scarcely be doubted that this style of religion had better be forborne, as, like Josiah's reformation, to a great extent superficial and unspiritual, and not likely to lead to lasting good results.

Finally, let us all remember that, whatever our labors and services for God and man may be, we are

still frail men, subject to the weaknesses and failings that are incident to humanity, and that our very success in good designs may make us "heady and high-minded," and lead us into needless entanglements in worldly strifes and policies which may cut short our usefulness, and tarnish our reputation. Let the fate of the excellent Josiah be a warning to us. Let us continually pray, "Take not thy holy spirit from us;" and, forgetting those things which are behind, reach forth to those things which are before, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

XXI.

JEHOAHAZ.

Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's stead in Jerusalem.—II. CHRONICLES XXXVI: I.

WHEN Josiah fell on the bloody field of Jezreel, the independence of his kingdom virtually fell; with his unwise meddling in the strife of his powerful neighbors, he rendered his kingdom henceforward their prey. Judah was ever after, in the forcible image of Isaiah, a ball violently turned and tossed between the rival combatants for supremacy.

Josiah was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz, who was, however, elevated to the throne by the popular voice, as our text tells us, and not by the strict law of hereditary succession. His brother Eliakim, who was two years older than himself, and therefore the lawful heir to the throne, was thrust aside to make room for him. The reasons of this irregularity do not appear; but the fact stated by the writer of the Chronicles in our text is corroborated by the concurrent testimony of the author of the Second Book of Kings. We can account for it only by conjecture. The disastrous issue of the battle of Megiddo, in which the excellent King Josiah was slain, had left the land without a ruler, while the Egyptian army,

flushed with victory, must needs pass through it on its homeward route, and would be likely to wreak upon it the vengeance which Josiah had so unwisely provoked by taking part with Assyria. All was confusion, panic, and dismay. Josiah had fallen a victim to his own worldly policy. Seldom do the people of God give way to the wisdom of this world without incurring punishment. Josiah had meddled to his hurt, and in disregard of the advice and warning of Pharoah—whom his hasty and ill-directed prudence in taking part with Assyria, as apparently the party least dangerous to himself, had forced into the unwilling attitude of an enemy—it was to his ruin. He “hearkened not unto the words of Necho,” the Egyptian king, “from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo.” Of his two powerful and dangerous neighbors, Egypt and Assyria, Egypt was the nearer; and in the war that had broken out between them, he thought it good policy to conciliate Assyria, as the party from which he had the least to apprehend for himself, by taking its part against Egypt, whose proximity made it formidable to him. His “strength was to sit still;” his wisdom, to maintain the position of a neutral. Egypt had no hostile intentions toward him. So Necho labored to assure him. An earthly prudence taught him otherwise, and the awful penalty came in his untimely death on the bloody field of Megiddo. And now as triumphant Egypt came sweeping across the country on its return, the bereaved people might well apprehend

its readiness to avenge this ill-judged and careless interference. It was under such circumstances that "the people of the land took Jehoahaz," the second son of Josiah, "and made him king in his father's stead in Jerusalem," in preference to his elder brother Eliakim, and in violation of his hereditary rights. It was the expedient of a moment of terror. It was not a time for punctilio. A leader they must have. Perhaps Jehoahaz was the more popular man of the two, the favorite of the nation. Perhaps he was the abler; certainly Eliakim, when he afterward came to the throne, evinced no such ability as might commend him to public confidence as the man for a difficult and momentous crisis. Perhaps Jehoahaz was at hand, while Eliakim was away. It might be that Eliakim was absent with his father in the disastrous war, and perhaps, in their imperfect knowledge of the facts, reported or surmised to be a prisoner or a sharer in his father's doom. For some one of these reasons, or for some other not discoverable, the people of the land "took Jehoahaz, the second son of Josiah," in preference to Eliakim, his elder brother, the rightful claimant, and made him king, in King Josiah's stead. Perhaps Eliakim, in a spirit of self-abnegation, voluntarily stood aside in the belief of his brother's greater fitness for the exigency. But however Jehoahaz came thus to supersede his brother, his taste of the sweets of power, his trial of his qualifications to rule God's people, was short. "He reigned three months in Jerusalem." A youth of twenty-three when he took possession of his father's vacant

throne; at the end of three months he was a dis-crowned captive, doomed to end his days in exile on the shores of the Nile. The popular voice in his favor could not make him adequate to exigency. His exaltation to power could not stay the progress of the avenging torrent. Necho came in indignation on his way back to Egypt and deposed the royal puppet. The choice of the people was now reversed. Jehoahaz was set aside, and the regular heir Eliakim set up under the name of Jehoiakim. The unwise meddling of Josiah had reduced his kingdom to a state of vassalage and dependence upon a foreign power, from which it never recovered. Henceforth in Judah the monarch was but a stipendiary and a subordinate. True, power might alternate between the Nile and Euphrates; but it had finally forsaken the Jordan, and the fallen line of David must fast decline into insignificance and obscurity. Of its royal diadem the prophecy of Ezekiel was to be fulfilled. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more, until he come, whose right it is, and I will give it him;" even that "Lion of the tribe of Judah," who is "head over all things to the Church," and "of whose kingdom there shall be no end."

The original name of Jehoahaz was Shallum, and by this name he is called in the prophecies of his contemporary, Jeremiah. Jehoahaz, the Lord's possession, as it signifies, is the name, it seems probable, which he assumed on his accession to the throne, and which was put upon him as a mark of vassalage by Pharaoh Necho. His character is briefly summed

up in the customary phrase, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that which his fathers had done." The details of his evil-doing are not given us, and indeed his transitory reign afforded small space for the development of his wickedness in the office of a ruler. This only we find charged against him, that he was rapacious and oppressive, when the prophet Ezekiel says of him, representing him under the figure of a young lion, "It learned to catch the prey, it devoured men." Yet still the hapless young usurper—such more by the people's will than his own it might seem—perhaps for the reason, if for no better, that he had been their choice, was lamented by the nation in his destiny worse than death as a captive in Egypt. "Take up a lamentation," cries the prophet Ezekiel in their behalf, "for the lion's whelp that was taken in the pit, and brought with chains into the land of Egypt." Yet, perhaps this was more pity than the tribute of any strong affection. And yet irreligion may be found in alliance with many attractive qualities, and such may have been the case of this unhappy young prince. Such qualities may have brought him to the throne irregularly. Hence he was cast down into a lifelong dejection and disgrace.

We cannot close our sketch of this unhappy prince better than in Jeremiah's words, with which, in the form of an address to him in the name of the Lord, the prophet bewails his mournful fate: "Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep

sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus saith the Lord touching Shallum, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, which reigned in the stead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place: He shall not return thither any more; but he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more." A king for three short months, a captive and an exile for many long years, a usurper of power that did not lawfully belong to him, a supplanter of a brother in his eagerness for distinction and control, a rapacious oppressor while his power lasted, a rebel against God and servant of vile, senseless idols, a usurper of power and abuser of it, wearing out his life in hopeless slavery and degrading dependence upon the will of another in an alien and hostile land, kept merely as a trophy of victory and a spectacle of fallen greatness; such is Jehoahaz, a melancholy and monitory picture truly.

But on these merely historical features of this instance of short-lived glory I must not dwell. The record of it is the Word of God, and that is always profitable. "Line upon line and precept upon precept" that Word presents to us warning and instruction in the lives of men, multiplies them, and exhibits to us different shades, sides, and aspects of sinful living, that it may frighten us from sinning by the various forms and consequences of sin and folly that with many voices say to us, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate," or allure and persuade us by many pleasant shapes of virtue and

godliness which say to us, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and happy is every one that retaineth her."

This king's life teaches us that distinction may be purchased at too dear a rate, and is so when it is obtained at the expense of violated obligations and by illegal means that disregard the restraints of duty and honor. Jehoahaz was a usurper. His father's throne was vacant, but this gave him no right to occupy it. It was not his, but another's, and that other was his brother. A popular impulse carried him to the throne in spite of this obstacle, and contrary to the established laws and polity of the kingdom. How far he originated the impulse or promoted it does not appear. But plainly he acceded to it, and rode upon it into power in gross contempt of his brother's lawful claims. Perhaps he had been a demagogue like Absalom, and had been scheming for the result, under a show of zeal for the people's welfare. At any rate he welcomed it, and in a moment of consternation and disorder unscrupulously raised himself into power. Crowns are dazzling things, and many to attain them have trampled under foot very sacred obligations, and done flagitious deeds. Nothing is charged upon Jehoahaz but thrusting himself, or suffering himself to be thrust, into a throne that was not his, to the injury of its rightful occupant. He was a thief that had stolen royalty and shone before the eyes of men in splendors that did not belong to him.

And now what was the result of this surreptitious

assumption of power to him, and in this life? Alas, poor king! What a transient pageantry was his royal pomp! He reigned only long enough to get his name on to the catalogue of evil kings, and be marked in the infallible Word as a bad man. And all this was the legitimate consequence of his usurpation, of his unauthorized assumption of kingly power. If he had been content to live in private life, and do his duty as a good subject of the rightful ruler in that state of life in which it had pleased God to call him, he might have spent his days in peace and quietness so far as the disturbed state of public affairs would have permitted. It was his ambition that thrust him into the sphere of danger. His brother Jehoiakim, the rightful king, when he came to the throne, experienced no harm or molestation. Indeed, as it might seem, it was this very usurpation of his, viewed by the victorious Pharaoh as an audacious assertion of independence in the face of the conqueror, that provoked him to pull down the intrusive image from its pedestal, and consign it to disgrace and infamy. Thus his ambition and presumption, his too eager grasping at advantages by means of questionable lawfulness, his violation of relative claims in his selfish eagerness for greatness, became the cause of his miserable downfall, and made his life a wretched story.

And, my brethren, this is a lesson to us that ought to be laid to heart. Such is apt to be the sequel of ill-gotten advantages, whether of gain or place, of

a disregard of conscience in a hasty, impatient grasping at good that may come within our reach. The seeds of decay and suffering are sown in it, though it may thrive for a season. "Seekest thou great things for thyself, seek them not," is the wise advice of the prophet, above all when thou canst not come by them innocently, for, as another prophet tells us, "He that getteth riches and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his latter end shall be a fool." The result shall demonstrate his folly. Alas! such cases, how they multiply in the land. Haste to get rich, haste to get great, too eager to wait for honest processes; and, in grasping eagerly at its end, trampling under foot the small impediments of the rights of this man and the other that lie across its path; rising to eminence with mushroom quickness, and dying with mushroom rapidity, like Jonah's gourd that came up in a night and perished in a night, is almost a distinctive peculiarity of our times. The quiet old way of being content with our place and making the best of it, or, if we aspire to a betterment of our condition, seeking it by honest labor and waiting till God in his providence opens to us a door and says to us, "Go up higher," is not much in vogue. Men, young men, must be rich soon, or seem so, must seek a show, and indulge in costly pleasures and fashionable vices. And then come peculations, defaults, and frauds, and forgeries and robberies, a short reign of glory, and soon the felon's cell, the penitentiary, the long, disgraceful, wearing imprisonment, a tainted reputation

to carry through life, a memory loaded with incurable misdeeds, and a solemn, remorseful looking to the judgment of God when life is ended. And if the result be less marked in struggles after power, it is only a little less apparent, not at all less real. Men are not content to rise by merit. That is altogether too slow a process, and, in the view of worldly minds, of too uncertain issue to content the eager aspirations of those whose vanity hankers after position for which no experience has fitted them. Intrigue, bribery, and false witness, unscrupulous use of money, false professions, promises which there is neither the ability nor the purpose to fulfil, misrepresentations of the views and acts of others, wholesale defamation and detraction, are brought into play to attain places of power, influence, and honor, of which however the honor is greatly abated by the dishonorableness of those on whom they are unworthily bestowed. For when unfit men get into distinguished places, the places sink to the level of the men much faster than the men rise to the height of the places. And is there not a Nemesis for these things in this world of ours, which, if Herod in his royal robes makes an oration unto the besotted people, and the cry comes up, "It is the voice of a god and not of a man," can smite him, so that he shall be "eaten with worms and give up the ghost"? Is there not some Pharaoh found who can bring him down from his pride of place to the manners that better befit him in some Egyptian captivity?

And short-lived is the enjoyment of all such good.

He reigned three months in Jerusalem; a usurped royalty he had, and he had it three months. What a prize was that to reward a man for violating the constitution of his country, despising the claims of brotherhood, and flaunting in robes of splendor which he and all men knew were his by no right human or divine? Poor king! poor king! Better have been the humblest peasant in his kingdom. Our tenure of such good as comes to us by unlawful means may be as short or even shorter; for all such good, as Shallum's did, carries in it itself the causes of its own decay and dissolution. There is an outer verge of life or divinity somewhere, in which "whatsoever a man soweth he shall also reap." But if it be continued to the end of life, what is it? "Behold thou hast made my days a span long." Prolonged it may be, but to what end? What are the dreary days of a disappointed avarice or a futile ambition, as it finds it has but the shadow of that it sought, and not its substance; haunted with spectres of past evil doing, and holding fast to that which has lost its power to please; looking forward to the awful darkness of the tomb, without the discovery of anything to cheer it; and dimly descrying through the gloom the judgment-seat of God, which, whatever be the creed, will show its shadowy form amidst the dimness, and tell of a day when God "will render to every man according to his works"? Such a lengthening out of the prosperity of wickedness may be far worse than the overtaking of adversity: what is it but a turning of life into a spiritual decay, not

wholly joyless or hopeless ; but like to the unbroken tranquillity of a stagnant lake, that, beneath its glassy surface, hides nothing but barrenness and putridity. Adversity like King Manasseh's might do him good ; while, the curse of God upon him, it might be that he should prosper to the end.

My brethren, "fear God and keep his commandments." Do your duty in that state assigned you. "Be content with such things as ye have." Seek advantage only by honest means, and under the leadings of Providence. In worldly goods so obtained there is stability and sweetness. Such power as so comes to you ends in no captivity in Egypt: the power of a good name, the consciousness of influencing men by their confidence in you, their respect for you ; the slow but sure growth of that influence for good that surmounts calumny and opposition, this shall stand amid the blasts like some sturdy oak whose roots are deep in the ground. Seek that in well doing, and it shall be well with you in time and forever.

XXII.

JEHOIAKIM.

And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and turned his name to Jehoiakim.—II. CHRONICLES XXXVI : 4.

So the royalty of Judah returned to its regular and legitimate channel ; for the brother whom Eliakim succeeded was younger than he, and was, as we have seen on a recent occasion, a usurper, intruded upon the throne by a popular impulse. Eliakim was Josiah's eldest son, and so, when Pharaoh Necho deposed Jehoahaz, and put Eliakim in his place, it was the triumph of right over might, according to the fixed and recognized constitution of the country. Yet his elevation was accomplished by the intervention of a foreign power, and that power, in changing his name at the same time that it placed him on the throne that rightfully belonged to him, displayed its superiority, and marked him as its dependant and vassal, branding him as it were with a stamp of servitude, as more a viceroy of Egypt than an independent king. Whether his name should be Eliakim—God will establish—or its tantamount, Jehoiakim—Jehovah will establish—might be of small importance in itself ; but that there was one over him who could compel him to make the change

was a thing of great significance, and showed but too plainly how low royalty had fallen in his person in Judah. They might call him king, but he evidently was little more than a satrap or vicegerent of the king of Egypt; and he could not hear his name called without being reminded of this. No Hebrew father had given him that name, but an Egyptian prince, whose supremacy, in accepting it, he acknowledged, and he dared not question. His very name was thus a badge of vassalage, and showed unequivocally that the royalty accorded to him was a weakened and tarnished royalty. Israelitish independence perished with King Josiah, on the field of Megiddo, by the fatal misstep of that worthy monarch; as the error of a good man may often precipitate the punishment incurred by a series of bad ones. The kingdom became base and servile, owing its precarious life to the will of powerful neighbors.

“ What seemed its head,
The likeness of a kingly crown had on.”

But it was but a seeming head, and it was surmounted by naught better than the *likeness* of a crown. Yet this humiliating dependence upon Egypt did not go far to protect Israel from the cupidity and hostility of Assyria, or rather of Babylon, into which Assyria had now melted. That Josiah had taken part against Egypt in the war that cost him his life did not purchase for the kingdom the protection of Babylon. Through Jehoiakim's thorough subserviency to Egyptian interests, Babylon saw in

his cowed and tributary kingdom little more than an outlying province of Egypt, affording a vulnerable point of attack to its more formidable adversary; and its sovereign became mainly anxious to get out of the way a shield, which, while thin and insufficient, did still interpose an obstacle to some extent to the success of its designs on its enemy on the Nile. The troubles of Jehoiakim's reign arose principally from the attacks of Babylon, which had now become in turn triumphant over Assyria, and the dominant power in the country on the Euphrates; these attacks were incessant, and were more and more tending to that complete ruin of the Hebrew kingdom, in which a few years later they were destined to issue. God had withdrawn his protection from the thankless and unfaithful people. Henceforth it was a doomed nation, to be tossed to and fro in the struggles for the mastery of the two mighty powers between which it lay, and be bruised between the upper and the lower millstone till it was ground to powder.

The life of Jehoiakim is briefly summed up by the historian in the customary laconic statement that "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God." What is more particular in him we learn chiefly from his connection with the prophet Jeremiah, with whose history his career was much and intimately interwoven. Of Jeremiah he was the persecutor, and yet in some degree the protector; he hated and yet feared him. His stern, undaunted ministry he revered and dreaded, while yet his

solemn warnings stirred him not to repentance and reformation. The prophet's reproofs and admonitions stirred him only to wrath and bitterness, and yet these feelings were chastened and restrained in a measure by a fearful and foreboding awe. The power of Egypt had been weakened by her defeat at Carchemish, so that the "trust in the shadow of Egypt" which the prophet denounces, became a "shame" to the prostrate nation. She seems to have cared little for the tributary over which she had so insolently asserted her power in carrying off its chosen monarch, and substituting a ruler of her own appointment; but left it to struggle unaided in its unequal conflict with the Babylonian conqueror. Or what is more probable, Pharaoh, smarting under the wounds Babylon had inflicted upon him, and stunned by his terrible defeat, had little heart to renew the strife for the ascendancy over Judah; but left the fallen and enfeebled kingdom to fall a prey to his adversary's cupidity. It was amidst such gloomy scenes and forebodings, the dying agonies of the kingdom, as it were, that Jeremiah exercised his ministry, and that what he saw and foresaw communicated to his words that plaintive character which has given him the name of the mournful prophet. "Oh! that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears," he cries, "that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." Jehoiakim, the king of the expiring monarchy, instead of girding himself up to meet the awful emergency, or resorting to

God for help in time of need, seems to have given himself up to a life of reckless pride, ostentation, and voluptuousness, and was only aiming to lead the life of a luxurious eastern monarch, while his throne was, as it were, crumbling beneath him. Jeremiah, with that clear foresight of coming events which divine inspiration gave him, foretold the success of the invader, and counselled submission, though that was only to change one master for another, and take Nebuchadnezzar instead of Pharaoh. Still in it there might be temporary peace, and the hope of better days. But such counsels only laid him open to the charge of disaffection and sedition, led to his arrest and imprisonment, and brought him into danger of death. It was this king, Jehoiakim, that in his impious defiance of God, and his messenger, cut the prophet's roll in strips, and burnt it in the fire, when "Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes that stood beside the king;" as though God's threats would vanish in its ashes, and "the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever," would depart with the shrivelling parchment on which it was inscribed. The futility of such a thought has been demonstrated oftentimes since. There is always a Baruch to revive perished truth and "write again the same words." Once, indeed, the sound advice of the prophet was taken, and "the plague was stayed" for a little time, by Jehoiakim's submission and vow of fealty to Nebuchadnezzar. But Jehoiakim was faithless. His covenant with Nebuchadnezzar was

soon broken. The people at this time were given up to idolatry. The temple was the scene of such abominations as Ezekiel saw in it in his vision on the banks of the river Chebar. "Every form of creeping things" was portrayed upon its venerable walls. "There sat women weeping for Tammuz," and there were "men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east." But the infatuated king was busy constructing a splendid palace, and exacting from the impoverished people ruinous and oppressive taxes to sustain his luxury and magnificence; "building his house by iniquity, and his chambers by wrong;" "closing himself with cedar," and painting his gorgeous apartments "with vermilion;" living in oppression and luxury, and in reckless indifference to his approaching doom. But all this was only to provoke God, and dare the indignation of the resistless Nebuchadnezzar, and so deepen and accelerate the deluge that was rolling toward him. A new invasion put an end to his wicked and inglorious reign. In the tumult and confusion of the conquest the unhappy prince disappears, after a reign of eleven years, at the early age of thirty. Doubtless he was slain, and fulfilled the whole of that disgraceful destiny which Jeremiah had years before denounced upon him. "Thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah! my brother! or Ah! sister. They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah! lord! or Ah! his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an

ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." Three thousand of the people were carried captive to Babylon, among whom were Daniel and his two companions, and it is probable, also, the prophet Ezekiel. A phantom of rule was left to Jehoiachin, or Coniah, Jehoiakim's son, to be exercised, under Babylonish dictation, over the impoverished and disheartened kingdom of his fathers; and so the first act in the Babylonish captivity was completed. Jeremiah's life was given him for a prey, and he was left to wail and warn amidst the ruin of his country till the fate he foretold for it should be consummated; and then in sad and weary servitorship weep its final downfall in his heart-broken book of Lamentations.

There stands before us in this miserable king another great moral picture, and it is not only the picture of an individual but of a class. It is a class which St. James in his graphic way describes. One might almost think that Jehoiakim had sat for the portrait. But, alas! there never are wanting extant specimens of it, so that it cannot be necessary to go back for an original to a king dead over five hundred years. "Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you." Men there are of a reckless, bold, self-indulgent temper, to whom the present is all, and who live to gratify themselves, seemingly careless at what cost; in whom experience and the lessons of the past work

no wisdom, and on whom the clearest warnings fall with no salutary effect. To narrow life into the now, and get from it all the pleasure it can furnish, seems to be their idea of living, and the end for which they live. Such a man may be the prince of good fellows among those who can contribute to his satisfaction; but if they dare to throw the shadow of their opposition across his path, he is cruel, remorseless, unrelenting; such a man was Henry VIII., if history has not belied him, though seemingly of stronger qualities than the Israelitish monarch, not so mean and cringing, but as unscrupulous; or Charles II., as complete a voluptuary and trifler, but with more good nature, and a fund of wasted sense. Such a man the author of *Wisdom* makes to say, "Come on, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present; and let us speedily use the creatures like as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments; and let no flower of the spring pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they be withered. Let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness; let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place; for this is our portion, and our lot is this." But along with this gay side of the man stands another that is grim and hideous. "Let us oppress the poor righteous man, let us not spare the widow, nor reverence the ancient gray hairs of the aged." "He was made to reprove our thoughts." "Let us see if his words be true; and let us prove what shall happen in the end of him." Such a man was Nero, swallowed up in

the grossest debaucheries, yet fiddling when Rome was burning, and burning Christians as torches to light up his gardens.

And such a man was Jehoiakim, according to Jeremiah's account of him. Warning was lost upon him. He lived in the present just for the enjoyment of the passing hour. He would not look at the future or provide for it, clear as were its portents of disaster. He disregarded God, and when men dared to tell him the truth they felt his wrath, and were oppressed and distressed as enemies of the State. His father had fallen in battle as the penalty of an unwise meddling. His brother, after a short usurpation, had been carried captive, and was languishing in exile somewhere in Egypt. He himself held his throne only by Pharaoh's sufferance; and now that Pharaoh was unclosing his grasp through weakness, Nebuchadnezzar stood ready to pounce upon the deserted prey. If anything could make a man think, it might seem to be such a position of affairs. But Jehoiakim would not think. "Eat, drink, and be merry," was his motto; and he counted him an enemy who dared to suggest any such disagreeable business as thinking. He is my enemy that is the enemy of my pleasure. And if some bold man shall presume to bring his book of solemn warning into my royal presence, I will cut it in pieces, and burn it in the fire, and it will be well for him that he is not with it to share its fate. Had he listened to the prudent counsels of the prophet of God, and consented to hold his kingdom in subordination

to the paramount authority of the king of Babylon, he might have retained his throne with such diminished honors as in such a position it could still possess, and transmitted it in peace to successive generations of his descendants ; but pride and impatience of aught that would curtail his personal consequence, or lessen his means of personal gratification, led him to break his engagements, and brave the wrath of his terrible antagonist ; and thus in his wretched end he stands to point a moral on the page of history, and become a testimony to the truth of Scripture that "pride goeth before destruction ;" and that while "the prudent man foreseeeth the evil, and hideth himself," "the fool rageth and is confident," and "so passeth on" with reckless disregard of consequences, "and is punished." "Yielding pacifieth great offences," and "the wrath of a king is a messenger of death, but a wise man will pacify it." "A living dog is better than a dead lion," and a vassal king far, far better than a carrion corpse. A too greedy snatching at or clinging to the whole of a good thing in a spirit of blind and unforecasting selfishness, especially if there be faithlessness and treachery in it, is apt to end in the forfeiture of all, when a prudent or politic moderation may, in relinquishing a part, save much, and retain the possibility of ultimately regaining the whole. This illustrates the self-defeating character of an engrossing selfishness, and the ruinous results of a spirit of self-indulgence that concentrates all its care on present gratification, and rushes headlong on the de-

struction it will not stop to foresee, "as the horse rusheth to the battle." A life whose ruling spirit is self-indulgence becomes sensual, cruel, blind, and suicidal.

But let us not confine our view to this brief life. The whole of this earthly existence may be taken as a short present, in which the great question before us is whether we will make self the main object of life, and, shutting out all serious concern for higher aims and more enduring results, live while we live in the worldling's sense, and resolutely trample down all that stands in the way of that form of earthly good which we have selected for ourselves, and meet on the threshold of eternity the repulse, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things;" or live while we live in the Christian's sense, live for nobler ends, that subordinate self, and call for the exercise of self-denial, self-restraint, and self-control, to awake from the sleep of death to the transporting plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servant." There is nothing truer than that a devotion to immediate gratification is a false self-love that defeats itself in its success, and buys its pleasures at too dear a price even in temporal effects; and that the determined spirit that "tramples down and casts behind the baits of pleasing ill," though it involves sacrifice, and the rejection of attractive pleasures within reach, is a real self-love, and yields far richer, more abundant, and more durable fruits in the long run. Oh, my brethren, doubt not that religion is wisdom, is policy, that it has the "promise

of the life that now is." But yet rise, I pray you, to a higher conception of your position, of your interests, of your true well-being. Shut up your views within this space of being, and care for nothing but to make the most of it. Shut out from your mind that awful retribution that soon will come in the shape of an enquiry into the use you have made of it. Let there be no entrance into your minds of the summons, "Give an account of thy stewardship." Grow unscrupulous and hard-hearted in your chosen pursuit, and treat all threats of a reckoning as a dream. If, startled into seriousness by some close pressure of troubles, you make a covenant with God to serve him, forget it as soon as the pressure is removed, and live as before, as Jehoiakim did—like him, too, resolutely shutting your eyes to the account to which you will soon be called for it. Let your heart grow lax with sensuality, vain with display, contracted with avarice, or empty with thoughtlessness. Be willing to practise fraud, unkindness, and oppression, if they will advance your objects. You may think it all judicious self-love, making the most of life; but it is the self-love of a fool. "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption." "Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles." You may not, like Jehoiakim, be "buried with the burial of an ass." "The rich man died and was buried," no doubt sumptuously, expensively, with a grand funeral. "But in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment."

Be sure of this, my brethren, that, whether we will think of it or not, a day of reckoning is at hand ; and that no ignoring it, leaving it out of our calculations, and living simply for things temporal, whether in their grosser or more decent and harmless forms, making no preparations for it, putting ourselves to no restraint for its sake, but going on, recklessly, blindly, with some vain, vague hope that it will be well with us "at the last," we know not how, we know not why, will prevent its coming, or shield us from its awful effects. There it is, sure as the Word of God, firm as his throne, and every breath we draw brings us nearer to its awful presence. My brethren, there is but one way for a wise being, and that is to live for eternity, and count all things that seem to be gain, but loss, in comparison of the good it offers ; all seeming loss gain that brings us nearer to its glories.

XXIII.

CONIAH.

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months.—II. KINGS XXIV : 8.

WHEN Jehoiakim, whose reign of reckless extravagance and tyranny ended in a death of violence “and the burial of an ass,” and he was “drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem,” the poor wreck of royalty that alone remained was his son Jehoiachin, who is elsewhere called Jeconiah, and Coniah, a youth of eighteen. He possessed it only for the short space of three months, and then was carried away to Babylon and passed the remainder of his life in captivity. Not much could be expected of such a youth, who, though in name a king, had little of a king’s power ; and who, if the power had been his, lacked time to accomplish any kingly work. Yet, brief and insignificant as his reign was, it was long enough to determine the character of the man, and the quality of his conduct in his station, and thus fix a certain stamp on his reign. They were bad. For, in the words of the record, so frequently repeated in the later stages of Judah’s history that they seem like the oft-recurring refrain of a song, “he did that which was evil in the sight of the

Lord, according to that which his father had done." It takes but a short time to show what a man is; and if he proves himself evil, it is a mercy to him and to others if his opportunity of action is cut short; since to him it could only be a "heaping up of wrath against the day of wrath," and to others brought but an occasion of mischief and misery. The sweets of royalty, if indeed there were any sweets in such an impaired and dishonored royalty as Coniah's, he tasted for three months only, and then went to increase the retinue of dethroned and expatriated monarchs that served to swell the state of the mighty Nebuchadnezzar. The kingdom when he received it was already reduced to nearly the lowest stage of weakness and disgrace; and the merely nominal sovereignty, which it served Nebuchadnezzar's purpose to still keep up in it, would be rather, to a high-minded and self-respecting man, a badge of humiliation and servitude, than a token of greatness and honor. Still, to even *shows* of dignity the minds of men cling; and we may well suppose that Coniah loved and took pride in such a ghost of royalty as had alone come down to him. Yet his possession of even this was very short. At the end of three months the Babylonian monarch laid siege to Jerusalem and took it. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was enraged at some show of independence in Coniah, or at his assumption of the throne without his express permission. Or it may be that he acted on the mere wantonness of power or upon some view of policy. So at any rate it was that he carried

Coniah to Babylon, where he was kept a close prisoner for many years. The weakened kingdom that had descended to him was now still further depleted and impoverished. The king's treasures and the treasures of the temple were seized. The nobles, warriors, and skilful workers of the nation were carried off. Few indeed besides the poor and weak were left behind. The miserable remnant was placed in the hand of his uncle Zedekiah, who was the last of Josiah's sons, and in him the direct royal line of David came to an end. For years the poor dis-crowned monarch Coniah languished in confinement, till at last, after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-Merodach, his successor, took pity on the fallen prince, and for some unknown reason distinguished him above other captive kings, brought him out of prison, changed his prison garments, "and made him sit at his own table," so that at last a gleam of comfort and indulgence shone upon his last days.

Of this unhappy prince it is that Jeremiah, in the midst of whose ministry his short reign occurred, speaks these solemn and eloquent words: "As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence; and I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall

ye die. But to the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return. Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David and ruling any more in Judah." Although childlessness is here denounced upon Coniah as part of his heavy fate, his *seed* is, you see, spoken of in the words that almost immediately precede, where it is said that his seed is cast out as well as himself; and, in another place, the *name* of a son of his is given. The solution may probably be that some child that he had at the time of his capture—an infant necessarily, from his own age, since he was but eighteen—was either put to death, or, according to the barbarous practice of the age, rendered incapable of continuing the royal line; so that, for the purpose of inheriting the royal honors, Coniah was without posterity. And no man of his seed sat upon the throne of David, or ruled in Judah. The royal stock, after the death of his uncle Zedekiah extinct in the line of Solomon, fell back to the descendants of Nathan, another of David's sons, "from whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, the true king of Israel, who is God over all, blessed forever." It is in this sense that Salathiel, of the line of Nathan, is called Coniah's son; not as such by blood,

but as his successor in carrying on the right of succession in the royal race. The word son is indeed used very loosely and with a large latitude of sense by the Hebrew writers.

But whatever may have been the personal qualities of Coniah, and however small the claims to their respect and attachment his brief rule may have acquired, the nation could not see the line of their ancient kings—remembrances of glories which though now faded and tarnished were still their pride—pass away in him, apparently into hopeless oblivion, without bitter grief and lamentation. The nation reeled under the blow; and, whatever he was, he attracted peculiar sympathy, in his fall, as the last of the lion cubs of the tribe of Judah, the last of the direct line of the house of David. Ezekiel in passionate sorrow represents him as the topmost and tenderest shoot of the royal cedar tree, which though “of low stature,” compared with the grand cedar whence it derived its life, had yet brought forth branches and shot forth sprigs;” but is seized and carried off by “a great eagle with great wings and many feathers,” and left upon the mountains to wither “in all the leaves of her spring.” So too is Coniah compared by the same prophet to a young lion’s whelp, that, when the old lion whom the beasts had before acknowledged as their master had been brought with chains into the land of Egypt, had “become a young lion and learned to catch the prey; but is taken in the pit, and put in ward and chains, and brought to the king of Babylon, that his voice

should no more be heard upon the mountains of Israel." Thereupon the nation, figuratively represented as a bereaved mother, droops in the sad sense that now "she hath no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule." This, says the mourning prophet, "This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation." The man had a value, independent of his personal attributes, as the representative of an interest and a time-honored and vital idea. Over the prostration of these the nation wept. Hope went with their departing king. The traditions and confidences of the people were defaced and obliterated. Nothing remained to them but vassalage and abject humiliation, unresisting and helpless subjection to the tyranny of the all-subduing Babylonian conqueror.

Too little that is specific is told us of this unfortunate young king to form the ground of any particular instruction to us. It is simply said of him that he did evil as his fathers had done evil. Doubtless he upheld and practised the idolatry which had first obtained such firm foothold and establishment under the zealous support and patronage of his ancestors Ahaz and Manasseh. For their relation and disposition toward this great national evil seem more than anything else to have been the criterion of the character of monarchs with the authors of this sacred history. Coniah had been born and educated in idolatry, and during the little time that he possessed the show of power, he did not discountenance or oppose it, but acquiesced in it and conformed to it. It was his misfortune to be the son of the

proud, self-indulgent, reckless Jehoiakim. "If he beget a son," says Ezekiel, a contemporary prophet, "that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like; but hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes: he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live." But in Coniah there was no strength of will or of moral principle. A bad father was to him not an admonition, but a precedent. Idolatry was in before him, who was a patron of idolatry, and he did not drive it out. Poor youth of eighteen! he could not arrest it, and, trained as he was in it, it is not likely that he would if he could. How much we are the result of circumstances! And how happy for us it is that the Lord knows us, and can judge us fairly in the light of our circumstances. By him actions are weighed.

Some general reflections are all that the case before us suggests. There is then an importance that rests simply in position, but it is not worth much. This was all Coniah had; otherwise very insignificant.

Men have a factitious and relative value, as well as that which is intrinsic and personal. We may be insignificant in ourselves, have no element of greatness in us, do no great acts, exert no extensive influence, have no inherent claim to importance in life or remembrance in death; and yet certain outward facts in connection with our existence on earth may make us a name, may draw around us the attentions and interest of men, and create a lively

feeling in regard to our weal or our woe; we may represent an interest which makes us precious, and throws around us a consequence altogether disproportionate to anything that we are in ourselves. Thousands sleep in nameless graves, and are forgotten, their image utterly vanished out of the city, their very names forgotten, and never mentioned under all the heavens, who had in them material for greatness; but one who in himself is inferior to most of them, but whom some accident of birth or fortune, as men speak, has made conspicuous; in whose life the stability of some social arrangement or civil institution may depend; with whom some hope or project will die; in whom is bound up the preservation of a family, or the continuance of an order of things on which the tranquillity of a community depends; but who, nevertheless, in all that magnifies manhood is below the average of the undistinguished mass, nay, even not much above idiocy, is regarded with far greater consideration, and makes a much larger figure in the picture of human life. Coniah personally was unimportant. He passed away from the field that was proper to him too soon to have done anything that was mighty. He was just merging into manhood. His reign lasted but three months. History ascribes to him no uncommon qualities. We have no particulars of any good that he did. We only know that what he did was bad. Intrinsically all we know of him is this: that a young man of eighteen, with powers as yet imperfectly developed, but not promising

any beneficial results, was removed from his sphere of action, before he had in any way signalized himself or done any memorable deeds, into an obscurity like death, to all practical intents, from which, to any purpose that we know of, he never emerged. That is certainly a very meagre and unmeaning record. But Coniah was a king. He sat upon a throne that was tottering upon its base, and whose very imperilled and assaulted condition made it conspicuous, interesting, and dear. Men's eyes were fastened on him with anxiety to see how it would go with him, and this very solicitude made him worm up, and gather consequence in their eyes. He was the scion of a noble and illustrious race. The very being of that race centred in him, and rested upon him. Take him away and the race was virtually extinct, and the shadow of its sceptre, dear though but a shadow, vanished. He was the barrier against changes of which none could see the extent or effects. And so men stood and looked at him—standing on his slippery and unsteady eminence—with solemn interest, with trembling fear, and saw him in a halo which did not emanate from himself, but which gathered around him from his circumstances. So his name is in God's book, and his fate is carefully recorded. A nation broke out into mourning over his downfall, inspired prophets spoke of him with deep concern, and his capture was a "lamentation, and to be for a lamentation." And these adventitious things may often mislead not only others but the man himself. It is a great thing in common opinion to be a king,

even if he be weak or wicked. But let us understand the true value of this adventitious importance. Let us remember that all that is adventitious is also transitory, and that nothing is eternal that is not also intrinsic. All else is but the shell of the life, that falls off soon and leaves it simply itself. No treasures, no titles, no crowns, no outside advantages of any kind go beyond the grave's mouth. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever;" soon all that is factitious will desert us. Righteousness is "above durable riches," durable honors, durable importance. Let us learn not to value ourselves upon what simply presses us up in a vain show, but on what makes us internally and eternally noble and good. That is all God cares for in us now, all he will take account of in us when we stand before his face. Here we learn what a poor thing it is to be a king and not kingly, to be great externally and not internally, and learn to value and to seek inward greatness in the sight of the Lord. We must do this if our life is not to be, if not a curse, no better than a toy.

Happiness is not the necessary consequence of high position. What an unhappy man was this king. Yet the contrary impression is so general and so deeply impressed upon men's minds that it is not easily dislodged. Men are always looking at some shining points in society which they feel sure must be the chosen abodes of bliss, and think if they could but attain them they should reach the sum-

mit of earthly felicity. The idea has embodied itself in the common saying, "Happy as a king." Far nearer to the truth is the sentiment which Shakespeare has put into the mouth of a king,

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

Oh! these gilded pinnacles, how deceptive they are, how false a report they bear concerning those whose lot it is to occupy them. An examination of individual cases would soon dispel the delusion, and convince an honest enquirer that palaces are among the most undesirable of human habitations; and that, as soon as men begin to rise above that average level where all reasonable wants meet with an easy supply, the enjoyment diminishes in inverse proportion to the elevation. Wise indeed is the prayer of Agur, so far as relates to the distinction that waits upon wealth, and which more and more, as the world grows older, is the prevalent and effectual scale of social rivalry: "Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me;" furnish me with mediocrity, and make me contented with it. Let us remember that the source, from whose life we are endeavoring to draw some practical instruction in God's house this morning, was a king. None was higher than he in all that nation; nay, none so high. It may seem to a careless thinker that such a position as his shut out all causes of suffering, and brought in all sources of delight. And now, what was his life? He began to reign at the age of eighteen, an age at which the

appetite for pleasure is as strong as it ever is, and the means of pleasure have the peculiar zest of freshness and novelty. Nothing as yet had palled by satiety or grown nauseous by excess. His father reigned eleven years. Since he was seven years old then he had occupied the position of a king's son, the heir and expectant of a throne. He had lived in a palace, and had witnessed and partaken of all the magnificence and luxury of the dwelling of a monarch who, in a time of impoverishment and distress, had built him a wide house "that was ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion." Yet what was this eleven years' reign of Jehoiakim? What but a period of uncertainty, apprehension, and alarm. What was the throne at that time but a gaudy seat held by precarious sufferance, at the mercy of a foreign potentate, who could at any moment crush and grind it beneath his feet! Was the court a happy place? And was the young prince, as his opening years forced him into a foresight of coming circumstances, happy in the prospect, happy in the outlook of that impoverished, distracted, and dishonored throne on which he was by and by to sit? Bands of foreign mercenaries, set on by the king of Babylon, kept the kingdom in continual turmoil, and the disheartened people looked to their king for a deliverance which he could not effect. Soon his father's reign went out in blood. He now was king in his father's stead. Three months only he reigned, and then, for the crime of his succeeding to his ancestral throne without Nebuchadnezzar's permission,

was dethroned, wore out many tedious years in a Babylonian prison, and when at last set free, lived a few years more as a pampered menial in a galling dependence upon charity, and died an exile. This was a king. It tells us what a king may be, or any great man in spite of his greatness. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." "Fear God, and keep his commandments." "Be content with such things as ye have." "Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven." And then when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a "real crown," a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away.

XXIV.

ZEDEKIAH.

And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah.—II. KINGS XXIV: 17.

THE deposition of Jehoiachin or Coniah, and his removal from the country by the Babylonian king, left the throne of Judah empty. Coniah had been deposed in punishment, it might seem, of his boldness in presuming to take possession of the throne of his father Jehoiakim without the permission of Nebuchadnezzar. The haughty monarch had become his master, and the real sovereign of his dominions. One son of the pious Josiah still remained, Mattaniah, then a young man of twenty-one. Him Nebuchadnezzar invested with the poor remnant of the royal dignity that was left, and with the title of king gave him so much of the kingly authority and honor as was consistent with his own paramount dominion. And with the throne he gave him a new appellation, changing his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah, thus, as before in the case of his nephew Coniah, branding him as his vassal, as it were, in the act of clothing him with this mockery of royal

state, and putting upon him a perpetual token of inferiority and dependence. The policy of this great conqueror, whose power was at this time extending itself with irresistible might and rapidity over all the eastern world, resembles that of the Romans at a later period, who, when they chose, and it seemed best to answer the purposes of their engrossing pride, left to the petty kings that submitted to their sway the name and show of royalty, together with such limited power as they might tolerate, and at any time curtail or extinguish. Such a king was Herod in the days of our Lord. And along with the vassal name, there was imposed upon the young sovereign a vassal oath, in which he swore allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, promised to pay him tribute, and solemnly engaged to exercise the functions of government in subordination to the authority of his Babylonian overlord, and to arrogate no independence of his supreme control. Such was the position, the abject and pitiful position of Zedekiah, the last of the kings of Judah, the fallen inheritor of the once glorious monarchy of such splendid kings as David and Solomon and Jehoshaphat.

Yet doubtless a crown, albeit so shorn of its true magnificence, was an attractive bauble to Zedekiah. Jerusalem and the temple still stood uninjured, and it was no small glory to be their master. The tribute exacted as the price of tranquillity was, it is probable, not very oppressive. Babylon was far away, and could not exercise a very close and constant scrutiny into his acts. The world is change-

able, and sooner or later a juncture might arise when the yoke of the Gentile might be thrown off, and God's people reassert their liberty. And truly, if Zedekiah had been wise and firm and constant, had been faithful to his solemn engagements, and understood how truly his strength was to sit still, he might have reigned in peace, exercised such authority as was left him without interference or restraint, and transmitted his dignity and his realm unhurt to successive generations of his posterity. There might, under such judicious conduct, have been a lengthening of tranquillity to him and his people. But the doom had gone forth; the end was at hand, and the folly of Zedekiah secured and precipitated the close. He was weak and restless and aspiring and untrue. He could not acquiesce in a condition which he felt to be humiliating. The yoke was galling, and he longed to throw it off. He would be a king in reality, and not in such a marred and restricted sense. He soon began to intrigue with neighboring peoples for concerted action in resistance of Babylonish tyranny, and thus render Jerusalem a nucleus of disaffection against the government of Nebuchadnezzar. Covert insubordination after a time ripened into open rebellion. His vows of allegiance were forgotten or disregarded, and he stood forth in avowed opposition to the gigantic power on whose sufferance alone the shadow of dominion that was left him hung for its preservation. During this period, and on to the disastrous issue of the unequal contest, the prophet

Jeremiah was the voice of God to the nation and its king ; but his predictions and warnings served only to exasperate the feelings of the people against himself, and render him the mark of their distrust and hatred. His predictions were accounted disloyalty, his warnings regarded as indicating a want of patriotism, and a slavish subserviency to alien interest ; he was scouted and set at nought, committed to a loathsome prison, and only saved from death by the timely interposition of the Ethiopian Ebed-melech. The king himself evidently entertained more humane feelings toward the intrepid messenger of God, and in various ways interposed to lighten the pressure of the public indignation. But Zedekiah was a weak, irresolute man, the tool of his nobles, and quite unable to stem the impulse of popular feeling. He himself said to Jeremiah, "Against them," that is the princes, "it is not the king that can do anything." Poor royal puppet ! at once the slave of a foreign power, and the sport of his own turbulent spirits.

The rebellious movement of the faithless and imprudent vassal was not long unknown at the court of the Babylonish monarch, and the wrath that was to punish the puny efforts of a presumptuous servant was not slow to meditate condign recompense for the flagrant breach of faith and the daring insolence combined in the offence. Nebuchadnezzar being made aware of Zedekiah's defection, either by the non-payment of the stipulated tribute or by some other means, sent an army to ravage Judea. The infatuated king in his consternation resorted to the

king of Egypt for help. An Egyptian alliance had been the ruin of his excellent father Josiah, who, in punishment for his unwise meddling in a quarrel not his own, had fallen on the bloody field of Megiddo, and left his weakened and distracted kingdom a prey to its haughty neighbors. Egypt had yet scarcely recovered from the effects of that disastrous day, and was poorly fitted to cope with its powerful rival. In vain had the prophet said, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help," and foretold that the trust in the "shadow of Egypt" should be their shame. In vain did Jeremiah remonstrate. "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? Thou shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria." Even then his brother Jehoa-haz, if still living, was an exile in Egypt, if not languishing in an Egyptian prison. The frightened king, aghast at the consequences of his own audacity in defying the might of Babylon, could see no better way, however, than that which had already reduced his country to the verge of destruction: the wretched policy of playing off one of the great powers—between which Judah was ground as between the upper and the nether millstone—against the other, as the balance of strength shifted backward and forward, from side to side. That was worldly wisdom. That was political sagacity. That was governmental cunning. Alas! faith was gone. God had ceased to be a factor in the king's calculations; and he could scarcely be appealed to to become the vindicator of violated oaths. Egypt could only "hope

in vain and to no purpose." The Babylonian army came, headed by its magnificent monarch in person, to chastise the insolence of the presumptuous vassal. The land was laid waste before it. Soon Jerusalem was besieged, and, after enduring the horrors of famine and pestilence in their direst and most loathsome forms, at the end of sixteen months was forced to surrender. The city was broken down, the temple was burned with fire, and the sacred vessels were carried to Babylon, to add splendor to the impious revelry of Belshazzar a few years after. The king himself in the confusion of the sack made his escape, but was soon overtaken and captured in the plains of Jericho. Nebuchadnezzar, having thus wreaked his vengeance on his offending tributary, had retired to Riblah, on the northern frontier of Palestine. Thither the captive king was brought, and there, in the dismal fate that was appointed to him, fulfilled the oracles both of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, though seemingly contradictory and incompatible, that he should speak to the king of Babylon "mouth to mouth," and his eyes should behold his eyes, and that he should be brought to Babylon, yet not see it, though he should die there. For after being brought before the victor, and beholding him, and seeing his children slain, he was deprived of sight, and led off to the royal city, there to languish and die in a hopeless and cheerless captivity. The catastrophe had come. The consummation of the woe that had been gathering through many generations had arrived. The ripened fruit of the evil

seed that had been sown centuries before by the good Jehoshaphat in mistaken views of expediency and conciliation fell from the tree. The cataract gave his final plunge to a stream that, beginning in a peaceful rivulet, had broadened, and deepened, and strengthened, retarded only a little for a time by the checks given it by the reforming zeal of Hezekiah and Josiah, till it poured itself forth at last in one downward leap into an abyss of desolation and ruin. Hear the testimony of God's Word: "Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord. And he also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel. Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in

the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or old man, or him that stooped for age : he gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes ; all these he brought to Babylon. And they burned the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon ; where they were servants to him and his sons."

Then rose from among the fragments of the city the plaintive wail of Jeremiah in the Book of his Lamentations : " How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people ! how is she become as a widow ! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary ! " " Behold, O Lord ; for I am in distress ; my bowels are troubled ; mine heart is turned within me ; for I have grievously rebelled ; abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death."

We see here an illustration of God's law of national retribution, his way of providential dealing with nations and communities. Zedekiah was far from being the most flagitious of the evil kings of Judah. Indeed, though not a high-principled man, he seems to have been rather weak than wicked, and " did evil in the sight of the Lord " chiefly in maintaining the idolatry which he found established,

and in the exhibition of that mixture of pride and irresolution which is common to feeble characters when raised to a position of difficulty and responsibility in a critical juncture of affairs, and which leads them into vacillation and faithlessness. He was not equal to his place, nor to its emergencies, nor to his own ambitious views and aims. Yet upon him fell the accumulated woes of long ages of misrule. The heaped-up guilt of many generations of his predecessors fell upon him, and upon his people; they were in a sense included in him and represented by him, and partook the same degeneracy and corruption. Nor is this caprice, but the working of a divine law. A nation, a community, any organized society of men has a corporate life and personality, and in consequence has also a corporate character and accountability which is quite independent of the individual liability of its members taken singly; and its character is good or bad according as it is or is not true to the end contemplated in its existence, provided that be innocent or salutary in itself, and to its conformity to the law under which it is established. And its good or evil is accumulated and growing as time wears on according to the number of its good or evil actions, and the measure of its faithfulness to its trust or abuse of it. Hence it is liable to chastisements inflicted to recall it to its duty; and when it becomes hopelessly corrupt, to be swept away and destroyed. And as its sphere is time, so are its recompenses temporal. Its probation, and every such body is on probation,

reaches not into that eternity where it is resolved into its component parts, and every one of its individual members in every period of its history singly must give account of himself unto God at that bar of eternal judgment which is to fix his state forever. Its doom comes when its wickedness has ripened it for ruin. Thus God waited long before his promise to give the land of Canaan to the seed of Abraham was fulfilled, because the "iniquity of the Amorites," gross and bold as it was, "was not yet full." And our Saviour tells the Jews of his time "that they were filling up the measure of their fathers," and that upon that generation would come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from the blood of righteous Abel. Alas for Zedekiah ! it was his lot to come into power at the time when Judah's wickedness had attained its fulness, and the recoil to evil after the brief reform of Josiah had rendered the nation too loathsome to be borne, so that "wrath came upon them to the uttermost." But for himself he gave account unto God only for his personal sin. Every nation, and our own, is undergoing the same probation, and we, by our individual good or evil doing in our day, are contributing to the sum of that virtue or guilt which shall be a lengthening of its tranquillity or a hastening of its doom.

Again, we see exemplified here the sacredness of solemn engagements, and the guilt and danger of infringing them. It is a special count in the indictment of Zedekiah that "he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar," who had made him "swear by God."

And yet how much might be said in palliation, if not defence of his breach of faith. No allegiance was, on grounds of natural equity, due to Nebuchadnezzar, and he had no original right to demand or exact it. It was yielded under compulsion, and was a mere enforced concession of weakness to overmastering power. The moral obligation of such an oath it may be thought must always have been weak—the mere resort of necessity, the device of the time—and was always covertly underlaid by the condition that its force should only continue till the exigency should terminate. So Zedekiah may have reasoned. So nations and their rulers are apt to reason. And under such reasoning treaties and covenants become, like the bonds of Samson, “threads of tow touched by the fire,” when strength and opportunity return. Such are man’s thoughts, but such are not God’s thoughts. With him Zedekiah’s oath, under whatever circumstances made, was sacred, and he could not be absolved from guilt in disregarding it on any plea of expediency or utility. Nay; the slighting of it was the drop that made the cup of the nation’s guilt run over. The good man of Scripture is the man that “swareth unto his neighbor and disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance.” We live in an age when the sanctity of oaths, and the obligation of all promises and engagements are fearfully relaxed; when public swearing for official purposes has come to be little more than a legal form; when the marriage vow is lightly regarded and dissolved on slight pretexts; and

truth between man and man is set at nought with little ceremony or compunction. Is it a foretokening of coming doom in a nation precociously old, and it may be feared precociously corrupt? Oh, if God be angry with us, small good will the rapid growth of wealth and knowledge and power accomplish for us; little way will it go to shield us from His ruinous displeasure. Let us rather imitate the fidelity of Joshua, who, though misled by false disguises into a covenant with the heathen Gibeonites, held it sacred and inviolable. Let our contracts with all peoples of the earth, and not the least with the poor, dependent race that are vanishing before our advancing steps, be sacredly kept. And in every relation of life, by our solemn respect for engagements and obligations, let us be examples of fidelity and steadfastness. We shall so save ourselves, and help to save our country.

Finally, let us see the peculiar advantages and perils that pertain to us as constituting a portion of the Church of God. That was Israel's special peculiarity among the nations of the world—they were the Church of God. No other people equalled them in this particular. In this respect they dwelt alone, and were not reckoned among the nations. "God had not dealt so with any nation, neither had the heathen knowledge of his laws." And because this was so, their guilt was greater, and their punishment heavier. "You only have I known among all the nations of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities." "Under the whole heaven

hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem." No other people could incur such guilt; no other people could deserve such punishment. We pride ourselves upon our possession of greater privileges than theirs; but let us remember that this possession is a perilous heritage. Yet who of us would prefer darkness or an inferior measure of light on account of the peril? None; and if we would, we would not have our choice. "That which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen." Here our lot is cast, and its responsibilities, its privileges, and its dangers are ours inalienably. By them we must live, and by them we must die, and by them we must stand or fall at the bar of God. And oh! if light and grace, if God's Word and House and sacraments, and all the lengthened opportunity of a life passed in a Christian land and in the bosom of the Catholic Church be lost upon us, and we are still wicked and impenitent and disobedient, what doom awaits us? "It shall be better for the men of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you." From the pinnacle of advantage we must sink to the lowest pit of despair. Beware, beware! We little think what we are doing while, in these pleasant and favored places of our sojourning, we are living so carelessly, so thoughtlessly, as though our salvation must be almost a thing of course, and we were not on that very account liable to an awful forfeiture and an aggravated condemnation. "Mad upon our idols," following after "the world, the flesh, and the devil,"

with gods as false and corrupt as Israel's Moloch and Ashtaroth and Baal, making by this idolatry our very show of worship "a vain oblation," and by our unsanctified and worldly lives turning this very holy place into "a house of merchandise" or "a den of thieves." God help us to understand and realize more perfectly the position we occupy, that we may escape the punishment of "men that break covenant," and stand before the Son of Man as in deed and in truth that which our baptism has made us, "members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven;" and, having made our "calling and election sure" by a life of faithfulness to our Christian obligations, find the reward of our faith in the salvation of our souls.

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